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Illegible Women: Feminine Fakes, Façades, and Counterfeits In Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture

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Illegible Women: Feminine Fakes, Façades, and Counterfeits In Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture

by

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2013

Dedication

To little A, *mon petit prince*.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are in order to Alexandra Wettlaufer, my supervisor, for her unflagging support and guidance on this project since its humble beginnings in the pages of a seminar paper on luxury fashion in nineteenth-century France. I cannot begin to express the depth of my gratitude to her for encouraging me throughout my graduate studies in Comparative Literature and holding me to the highest of standards in my research and writing, especially as I completed this dissertation. Her enthusiasm about my project, reassurance of the value of my pursuits, and efforts at helping me find a home within the academic community at UT and beyond kept me going when self-doubt might otherwise have defeated me. The model of scholarship she provides has been an inspiration.

I am also deeply grateful to my committee members for generously reading my work and providing insightful comments and suggestions. Thank you to Lynn Wilkinson and Hannah Wojciehowski for repeatedly pushing me to dig more deeply. I extend my thanks to Karen Pagani for her invaluable feedback throughout the writing process. I am furthermore especially indebted to Carol MacKay for the direction she has provided me since the early days of my graduate studies, her ever-upbeat attitude toward my academic pursuits, and her contagious passion for visual culture. Finally, I thank Dr. Wettlaufer and my readers for authenticating my identity as a scholar at times when I otherwise felt like a fraud.

Jean Fallon, my advisor at Hollins University, deserves a tremendous thank you for encouraging me to pursue the path I have chosen. I would not be where I am today without her fervor for French language and culture, her infinite wisdom, and most of all, her friendship.

To my family, I extend my gratitude for guiding and supporting me along the way. My parents championed the value of education and stuck with me for twenty-five years of schooling. Thank you to George, as always, for tolerating (and indeed, occasionally promoting) my fixation on cashmere shawls, cyborgs, and the ubiquitous bad girls of literature, art, and film. Finally, little A, you have given new meaning to my work. I will never be able to thank you enough.

Illegible Women: Feminine Fakes, Façades, and Counterfeits In Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

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Examining periodicals and novels from 1847 to 1886, I analyze the feminine fake to argue that individuals were beginning during this period to grapple with the discomforting idea that identity, especially gender, might be a social construct. Previously, scholars have contended that this ideological shift did not occur until the 1890s. I apply the term "feminine fake" to the tools that women use to falsify their identities and to the women who counterfeit their identities. Equally, I consider the fake as a theatrical moment of falsifying one's identity. In my first chapter, I set up my theoretical framework, which draws from Laqueur's writings on the cultural history of sex and gender, Poovey's work on the "uneven development" of gender ideology, and Baudrillard and Eco's respective concepts of the simulacra and the hyperreal. Chapter II examines issues of *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* and *La Mode illustrée* to analyze the feminine fake during the period surrounding the Franco-Prussian War. Using Fraser, Green, and Johnston's writing on the periodical alongside Hiner's theories of the ideological work of the accessory, I argue that the women's magazine, particularly via

the "rhetoric of the fake" therein, fashion, and the accessory were crucial sites for the construction of gender at the time. Chapter III looks at performance and the feminine fake in *Vanity Fair* and *La Curée*. I re-evaluate Voskuil's theories of "acting naturally" to analyze the charades and *tableaux vivants* within the novels and illustrate how these performances metaphorically function as society's failed efforts to render feminine identities legible. In Chapter IV, I analyze *Lady Audley's Secret* and *L'Eve future*, situating Lady Audley and the android as hyperfeminine, or marked by an identificatory excess rendering them more feminine than any real woman. The threat they pose to legible feminine and human identity drives the need to control their unmanageable identities: at the ends of the novels, the women, along with what I characterize as their inhuman fakery, are irreversibly contained.

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Introduction: *Mademoiselle de Maupin* and the Feminine Fake

In Théophile Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835), a young woman disguises herself in gentlemen's clothing: she has hopes of becoming enlightened about the opposite sex before resigning herself to a lifetime married to a crude man who hides his true self in the company of women. By cross-dressing, the protagonist of Gautier's text, Madeleine de Maupin, is able to perform, and in many ways, embody, masculine identity within the novel. Her embodiment of masculinity, as I argue here, illustrates that artists and audiences of the 1800s were beginning to think of gender as a construct, in other words, as a product of social actions and cultural artifacts, rather than as innate. Not only do we witness characters within this novel struggling with this burgeoning conception of gender much earlier than scholars usually remark this phenomenon, but we moreover observe the nineteenth-century impulse to identify, understand, and contain the feminine fake. In this project, as I describe in greater detail in the pages that follow, I define the feminine fake as a tool that women use to falsify or manipulate their identities. I likewise apply to term to the women themselves who counterfeit their bodies and identities using these tools. Finally, I consider the fake as an action or theatrical moment of falsifying one's identity.

I explore these loaded terms, their many manifestations, and myriad implications in a wide variety of nineteenth-century texts, with special attention to the ways in which they reflect growing concerns about the volatility of identity during this period. By

manipulating their identities via such "feminine fakes," the women in the French and British texts I treat throughout this project render their identities "illegible"; in other words, they make it difficult, if not impossible, for others to read their gender, class, and/or national identities simply by looking at them. Many scholars, including especially, those discussing Oscar Wilde, have demonstrated that readers and writers of the nineteenth century began to contemplate the fluidity and instability of gender and identity categories in the 1890s. However, through my study of the feminine fake, I argue that this, in fact, occurred several decades earlier in the century.

Madeleine/Théodore vacillates between male and female identities throughout the novel, both in the eyes of other characters and in her/his own estimation. In love with Théodore, the hero D'Albert admits, though reluctantly, that he has found his amorous ideal in a man, but he likewise insists that the young chevalier could not be anything other than a woman. That is to say, D'Albert often views the object of his love as a sort of sexually hybrid creature. He alternately calls her Rosalinde (from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, a theatrical *mise en abyme* within Gautier's novel) and Théodore in his love letter to her/him at the end of the novel and maintains he has been unable to ascertain her/his sex. D'Albert writes, "je me disais: Assurément c'est une femme; — puis tout à coup un mouvement brusque et hardi, un accent viril ou quelque façon cavalière détruisait dans une minute mon frêle édifice de probabilités, et me rejetait dans mes irrésolutions premières"[1] (I said to myself: 'It must be a woman'; and then, a sudden, forthright movement, a manly tone or gesture would destroy my flimsy edifice of

[1] Théophile Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1966) 323.

probabilities in a trice and throw me back into my original state of uncertainty).[2] The repeated insistence upon the hybridity or duality of Madeleine/Théodore's identity within the narration illustrates that Madeleine, though born female, could conceivably cultivate a male identity and thus inhabit both sexes at once.

The cross-dressing protagonist similarly insists that her identity comprises both sexes, and yet neither. She writes: "En vérité, ni l'un ni l'autre de ces deux sexes n'est le mien…je suis d'un troisième sexe à part qui n'a pas encore de nom…j'ai le corps et l'âme d'une femme, l'esprit et la force d'un homme, et j'ai trop or pas assez de l'un et de l'autre pour me pouvoir accoupler avec l'un d'eux" (356) (The reality is that neither of these two sexes is mine….I am of a third, separate sex, which does not yet have a name….I have the body and soul of a woman, the mind and strength of a man, and I have too much or not enough of the one or the other to be able to pair up with either) (318). Madeleine's self-positioning as a member of this third sex and D'Albert's assessment of her as simultaneously man and woman highlight the idea that Madeleine has imagined and composed her own sexual identity. Indeed, Madeleine has convincingly learned typically male mannerisms, activities (e.g., sword fighting and seduction), and ways of thinking during her quest to discover the secret world of men and now often feels as if she is more of a man than a woman. Madeleine's acquisition of such "male" traits underscores the possibility that gender is not, after all, innate and stable, but rather, something that can be destabilized and reconstructed. As I argue throughout this project, authors like Gautier and their readers were beginning to grapple with the possibility that

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[2] Théophile Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, trans. Helen Constantine (New York: Penguin Group, 2005) 287.

gender identity, as well as class and national identity, were subject to re-imagination and reconstruction.

Furthermore, Madeleine's engagement with what I call the feminine fake is perplexing, disorienting, and unsettling for the other characters in *Mademoiselle de Maupin* because it renders her illegible. In direct opposition to the theories of Lavater and the popular *physiologies* of the period, Gautier's character demonstrates the *difficulty* of reading, interpreting, and understanding the unknowable other through the visible languages of appearance, the body, and clothes. Via her wardrobe in particular, but also in her performance of masculinity that she apparently internalizes, she persuades the world around her, and the lovesick D'Albert in particular, that she is a man. As she continually upsets conventional notions of gender, the other characters attempt to place her into fixed and recognizable categories in order to better understand and thereby control Madeleine and her identity, but to the very end, she resists and exceeds the either/or choice of the binary. After an exhilarating evening of sexual bliss spent first with D'Albert and then with Rosette, Madeleine deserts both of her lovers, writing to D'Albert: "Votre amour eût été bientôt mort d'ennui…J'ai au moins cette satisfaction de penser que vous vous souviendrez de moi plutôt que d'une autre. —Votre désir inassouvi ouvrira encore ses ailes pour voler à moi; je serai toujours pour vous quelque chose de désirable où votre fantaisie aimera à revenir" (375) (Your love would have soon died, out of boredom….At least I have the satisfaction of thinking you will remember me more than anyone else. Your unassuaged desire will once more spread it wings and fly to me. For you, I shall always be something desirable that your fancy will like to dwell upon

again) (335). Not only does D'Albert wish to contain Madeleine and her fakery and keep her identity in check by placing her neatly into either the male or female gender, but he also wishes to contain her by possessing her and continuing to do so. She knows, however, that a sustained relationship with D'Albert would shatter his ideal, for he would eventually cease desiring her, as he always does once he has acquired something for which he has yearned. Ultimately, Madeleine will not and cannot be contained within *Mademoiselle de Maupin*: at the close of the novel, she rides off, able to inhabit the third sex that she proclaims to embody, and refusing to be possessed by either man or woman.

Works such as Gautier's novel shed light on the anxiety caused by the feminine fake as it upsets notions of stable identity during the nineteenth century and renders female characters difficult to read. Critical reception of *Mademoiselle de Maupin* during the nineteenth century was greatly varied, but always unwaveringly opinionated, as Jasinski,[3] Sadoff,[4] and Geisler-Szmulewicz[5] each point out. For example, Hugo, Balzac, and Mallarmé fervently praised the work, while Zola and Gide gave it derisive reviews. The widespread ambivalence about Gautier's first novel within contemporary reception shows the sense of unease with which the pubic received the text. While critics did not generally focus explicitly on Madeleine's gender identity, many drew attention to the text's overt sexual references and scenes, often with a great deal of discomfort. A writer

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3 René Jasinski, *Les Années romantiques de Théophile Gautier* (Paris: Librairie Vuibert, 1929).

4 Janet Sadoff, "Ambivalence, ambiguity, and androgyny in Théophile Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin*," Diss. Harvard, 1987.

5 Théophile Gautier, *Oeuvres Complètes: Section I Romans, contes et nouvelles, Tome I: Mademoiselle de Maupin*, Ed. and Intro. Anne Geisler-Szmulewicz (Paris: Honoré Champion Editeur, 2004).

for the *Chronique de Paris* wrote in 1835, "Vous y trouverez trois comparaisons tirées des latrines, six qui se rapportent au viol…tout ce que l'on renferme dans les cabinets les plus secrets, tout ce que l'on jette à la voirie…Il a pour résumé cette phrase tirée de la préface : 'La jouissance me paraît le seul but de la vie et la seule chose utile au monde"[6] (You will find there three comparisons taken from the latrines, six that are related to rape…all that one shuts away in the most secret closet, all that one throws away in the refuse…One could summarize it with this phrase pulled from the preface: 'Pleasure appears to be to be the sole goal in life and the only useful thing in the world').[7] Until the end of the nineteenth century, critics—including Sainte-Beuve and Henry James—noted Gautier's emphasis on the body and the senses as well as the blatant sexuality of his writing and his characters (Sadoff 4-5). It appears that, while much of the criticism of the eroticism of Gautier's work censured his text for its pornographic tendencies, other reviewers highlighted their discomfort with the sexual nature of his writing without accusations of immorality. That is to say, much of the anxiety expressed about *Mademoiselle de Maupin* around the time of its publication and throughout the 1800s centered on the *sexuality* of the novel's characters, rather than the sex acts represented in the book. Indeed, Gautier's novel unsettled the way readers thought about sexuality and its ambiguous relationship with gender identity for another century after its publication.

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[6] Al. de C., *Chronique de Paris*, 13 dec. 1835, 314-315, qtd. in Jasinski and Sadoff.

[7] Here, and unless otherwise noted, translations are my own.

Chapter I: The Feminine Fake and the Construction of Identity in the Mid- to Late-Nineteenth Century

Sixty years after the appearance of *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, Oscar Wilde—who was himself influenced by Gautier—questioned popular notions of masculinity and sexuality through his writings and his meticulously crafted, theatrical public persona. In "The Critic as Artist" (1891), Wilde famously wrote, "Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth."[8] An author perpetually concerned with artifice and its relationship to identity, Wilde is particularly important to this project because he has become for us today the center of a large portion of scholarly discussion about the revolution in nineteenth-century ways of thinking about identity. Indeed, the proposal that some readers and writers of the nineteenth century began to reconceptualize gender and identity is most often linked to Wilde and pinpointed to the 1890s. The early 1890s, of course, mark Wilde's most prolific years, and his infamous trials for indecency took place in 1895. Furthermore, the ideas Wilde values in his writings, such as artifice, artfulness, and lying were certainly not new in the 1890s and were, as I demonstrate in the pages that follow, inextricably linked to feminine, rather than masculine, identity much earlier in the century. Finally, Wilde sheds light on how the British imagination clearly tied French citizens, Frenchness, and all things that come from France with the fake.

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[8] Oscar Wilde, "The Critic as Artist," *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (New York: Harper Collins, 1989) 1045.

OSCAR WILDE AND THE MASCULINE ART OF ARTIFICE IN THE LATE-NINETEENTH CENTURY

Scholars have made much of Wilde's influence—and specifically his notorious indecency trials—on the destabilization and reconceptualization of notions of gender and sexuality at the end of the nineteenth century in both Britain and on the Continent. Alan Sinfield and Ed Cohen have each linked Wilde and his trials with a drastic shift in Victorian thought about gender and sexuality. In *The Wilde Century*, Sinfield claims that male effeminacy and homosexuality only became connected in the cultural imagination at the moment of Wilde's trials and were not, as our twenty-first century imaginations might take for granted, already linked in the minds of the Victorian public. As Sinfield writes,

> For us it is hard to regard Wilde as other than the apogee of gay experience and expression, because that is the position we have accorded him in our cultures….But Wilde's typicality is after-the-effect—after…the trials helped to produce a major shift in perceptions of the scope of same-sex passion. At that point, the entire, vaguely disconcerting nexus of effeminacy, leisure, idleness, immorality, luxury, insouciance, decadence, and aestheticism, which Wilde was perceived, variously, as instantiating, was transformed into a brilliantly precise image. [9]

This newly "precise image" is our contemporary idea of "the homosexual," which was indeed forming and hence beginning to be articulated at this moment (8). Cohen, in *Talk*

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9 Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde, and the Queer Moment* (Cassell: London, 1994) 3.

on the Wilde Side, further posits, "By 25 May [1895], when Wilde was sentenced to two years' imprisonment with hard labor, after having been tried twice and finally convicted on seven counts of engaging in 'acts of gross indecency with another male person,' his case was already so well known that it had significantly altered the shape of the Victorian sexual imagination."[10] The trials shaped not only Victorian thinking about gender, sexuality, and identity, but also French notions of these categories. Continental thinkers had already been theorizing homosexuality much earlier than the 1897 appearance of Havelock Ellis's *Sexual Inversion* in Britain,[11] and Continental laws governing male homosexual acts—especially in France—were often much more lenient than British laws. Thus the accusations against Wilde perhaps appeared generally less outrageous in France than they did across the English Channel; however, the French public followed the trials fanatically and was nonetheless also greatly affected by the figure of Wilde and his infamous case. Nancy Erber analyzes the extensive coverage the Wilde trials received in the French press in 1895 as well as the attention his trials and persona were given in various French authors' letters and other writings in subsequent years.[12] In their respective works, Jacques de Langlade,[13] Richard Hibbitt,[14] Stefano Evangelista,[15] and

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10 Ed Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side: Toward a Genealogy of a Discourse on Male Sexualities* (Routledge: New York, 1993) 1.

11 As Cohen reminds us, Austro-Hungarian Karl Maria Kertbeny coined the word "homosexual" in 1869, and the word was further popularized on the Continent by German sexologists (9).

12 Nancy Erber, "The French Trials of Oscar Wilde" *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 6.4 (April 1996) 549-588 Web, 08 Aug 2012.

13 Jacques de Langlade, *Oscar Wilde: écrivain français* (Paris: Stock, 1975).

Emily Eells[16] likewise thoroughly illustrate the immense influence Wilde had on the French and vice-versa, which I treat in further detail below.

As Sinfield and Cohen have so clearly articulated, the persona of Oscar Wilde, alongside the highly public spectacle of his trials for gross indecency, drastically challenged the ways the late-nineteenth-century public thought about gender and sexuality. They might add that Wilde implicitly likewise stirred up ways of thinking of other categories of identity, such as nation and class, for as a cosmopolitan, middle-class Irishman who maintained sexual relations with upper-class Englishmen, both his Englishness and his class identity were called into question. Extrapolating from Sinfield's and Cohen's arguments that Wilde revolutionized perceptions of gender and sexual identity at the fin de siècle, we can further postulate that at this point in the century, the British and French publics had already begun to question their conceptualizations of identity as stable and innate. Though individuals in the nineteenth century would not have described this transformation of their cultural consciousness using these specific terms, we would say today that they were starting to perceive gender

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[14] Richard Hibbitt, "The Artist as Aesthete: The French Creation of Oscar Wilde" *The Reception of Oscar Wilde in Europe* Ed. Stefano Evangelista (London: Continuum, 2010).

[15] Stefano Evangelista, "Introduction: Oscar Wilde: European by Sympathy" *The Reception of Oscar Wilde in Europe* Ed. Stefano Evangelista (London: Continuum, 2010).

[16] Emily Eells, "Naturalizing Oscar Wilde as an *homme de lettres*: The French Reception of *Dorian Gray* and *Salomé* (1895-1922)" *The Reception of Oscar Wilde in Europe* Ed. Stefano Evangelista (London: Continuum, 2010).

and identity as constructs,[17] that is, subject to re-imagination and re-creation; Wilde's entire persona was, after all, an elaborate fabrication. However, even while many categories of gender and identity, such as the masculine/feminine binary, were being broken down, new categories, such as the homosexual/heterosexual binary, were takimg shape during this period (Cohen 10). Ideologies of gender and identity, as I indicate in Chapter II, are continually under revision, and many late-nineteenth century readers and writers were becoming aware of the fluidity of such categories. It would be, of course, a gross oversimplification to argue that all French and British citizens were reconceptualizing identity during the 1890s, but the above example of Oscar Wilde and his trials clearly illustrates that these issues were in the public's mind at the time.

A variety of other scholars have located the revolution in nineteenth-century conceptions of gender and identity in the final decade of the nineteenth century. Alongside Oscar Wilde, Rachilde has typically been positioned as a writer who dramatically stirred up assumptions about gender in the last decades of the nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth century. While Rachilde often flouted traditional expectations about her dress and gender while penning works considered pornographic, her life and impact on conceptions of gender may not have been as radical as scholars have previously thought. Melanie Hawthorne, for example, in her biography

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17 Throughout this project, I use Judith Butler's theories of gender as performance as my point of departure for discussing gender as a construction during the nineteenth century. While I do not purport that nineteenth-century readers and writers thought, as Butler argues, that there is no naturalized, objective or bodily reality to gender, I argue here that they were beginning to perceive gender as a product of social actions and cultural products such as dress, rather than as inborn. I discuss Butler and the implications of her work for my project in greater detail below.

of Rachilde, states, "[W]hat these chapters show is that Rachilde was not the exception that she has so often been described as. Rather, she used the claim of exceptionality as a way to exist within the status quo. In using this strategy (and many others), she was very much the product of her time."[18] Such statements, of course, do not serve to devalue the far-reaching impact Rachilde has had on French literature or to diminish the complexity of Rachilde's own gender identity/ies and performance of gender, but rather, to further illustrate that the supposedly tremendous changes that occurred in popular conceptions of gender and identity at the end of the nineteenth century were far more gradual than has been previously believed.

We have thus long assumed that, until the 1890s and the era of authors such as Wilde and Rachilde, writers and readers of the nineteenth century largely considered gender, and by extension, identity, to be inherent and stable. As Margaret Beetham claims in her study of the feminine press, *A Magazine of Her Own?*, "At certain moments the radical instabilities of these categories [femininity, sexuality, and gender] and the slippages between them became obvious, as happened in the 1890s. However, that instability was endemic throughout the nineteenth century."[19] The widespread challenging of categories of gender and identity to which most scholars refer took place at the end of the nineteenth century when gendered "types" such as the New Woman and

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18 Melanie Hawthorne, *Rachilde and French Women's Authorship: From Decadence To Modernism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001) *eBook Collection*, Web, 21 Jan. 2013.

19 Margaret Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine 1800-1914* (London: Routledge, 1996) 4.

even the Decadent Artist materialized as influential players in the cultural landscape (Beetham 112). Beetham further contends,

> The New Woman and the Decadent Artist were signs of this crisis of gender identity which extended beyond questions about 'true' masculinity or 'true' femininity to a more radical questioning of the relationship of gender and sexuality….Ideological struggles around gender, sexuality and the body were obviously not 'new' in this period but they took on an unusual intensity and importance. (112-113)

Beetham points out, as do Cohen and Sinfield, that the crisis in gender and sexuality at the end of the nineteenth century was largely bound up in the anxiety about *male* gender and sexuality: "The new problem was defining a man's sexuality when behaviour, dress and deportment—the marks of gender—could not distinguish the heterosexual man, married or unmarried."[20] However, earlier in the century, as demonstrated within the periodicals and novels I analyze in the pages that follow, the crisis surrounding gender identity was linked to *femininity* and *female* sexuality.

Such "ideological struggles around gender, sexuality, and the body," which, indeed, were not novel to the 1890s, can be traced to at least as early as the 1840s and through the mid- to late-nineteenth century. In examining the proliferation of feminine fakes throughout the literature and culture of this era, we can shed light on the emerging conception of the constructedness of gender and the impact of the ideological struggles

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[20] Beetham 113. For more on the nineteenth-century anxiety surrounding masculinity and masculine sexuality, see also Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight* and Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints*.

surrounding identity much earlier in the century than we usually realize. Indeed, to understand the late-nineteenth-century identity crisis to which so many scholars refer, particularly as it is linked to Wildean artfulness and artifice, we must step back and look at the roots of the phenomenon at mid-century. It appears, in fact, that mid-nineteenth-century writers—especially, and perhaps most ironically, those for whom realism was an acutely important value—may have been demonstrating, as Wilde suggests in the above witticism, that stable, authentic identities and the categories that govern these identities, did not exist after all: inherent in all of these narratives is the notion that an authentic identity might be a myth, or a fake.

Wilde famously celebrated all things artificial or inauthentic throughout his writings, but particularly in his novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). Dorian, of course, is the ultimate fake: his flawless, youthful appearance hides the horrors of his depraved lifestyle, which are revealed only in Basil's portrait of the protagonist hidden from all eyes. When Dorian first notices the change in the painting brought on by his Faustian wish, he observes:

> Yet it was watching him, with its beautiful marred face and its cruel smile. Its own bright hair gleamed in the early sunlight. Its blue eyes met his own. A sense of pity, not for himself, but for the painted image of himself, came over him. It had altered already, and would alter more. Its gold would wither into grey. Its

> red and white roses would die. For every sin that he committed, a stain would fleck and wreck its fairness.[21]

Dorian promises himself he will reform by marrying the actress Sibyl Vane, relinquishing his toxic friendship with Lord Harry, and living a "beautiful and pure" (103) life. However, upon discovering Sibyl's suicide, he decides instead to keep his godlike beauty and allow the figure in the portrait to wither and decay, as he leads a life seeking pleasure by worshipping artifice and the senses. Of the artwork, Dorian muses,

> [T]here would be a real pleasure in watching it. He would be able to follow his mind into its most secret places. This portrait would be to him the most magical of mirrors. As it revealed to him his own body, so it would reveal to him his own soul. And when winter came upon it, he would still be standing where spring trembles on the verge of summer. (118)

Artifice in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is linked to Dorian's masculine identity and anxiety about his sexuality. The artist Basil Hallward confronts Dorian with the rumors of his horrific behavior but confesses he does not believe that Dorian has committed such crimes because "Sin is a thing that writes itself across a man's face. It cannot be concealed.…If a wretched man has a vice, it shows itself in the lines of his mouth, the droop of his eyelids, the moulding of his hands even" (165). Basil shows his concern regarding the many men Dorian has allegedly ruined: it is clear that among his sins responsible for sullying the painting, Dorian has been implicated in the acts for which the novel's author would soon be put on trial.

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[21] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (London: Penguin Books, 1985) 103.

Before the publication of Wilde's writings, such concern about artifice was not, however, linked to male identity and sexuality. For example, Miss Evelyn in Villiers's *L'Eve future* (1886) is described to be as hideous as Dorian's image in the painting at the novel's end, but she is able to transform herself into a woman of exquisite beauty using a cache of cosmetics, prosthetics, and other accoutrements to lure in and deceive men, leading them to their demise. Decades earlier, both Mary Elizabeth Braddon's Lady Audley and William Thackeray's Becky Sharp rely heavily on trickery and deception in order to seduce and ruin the men around them. In other words, anxiety about artifice and fakery was fundamentally associated with apprehensions about femininity, and especially unhinged female sexuality.

Wilde's life and writings further exhibit the long-established correlation between the fake and Frenchness in the British imagination. As many scholars have noted, Wilde's second home was Paris, and he died there in exile in 1900 after his release from prison. Not only was he self-professedly influenced by French authors, but his work also in turn inspired a number of writers across the Channel, and he even penned his play *Salomé* in French. The intricacies of the cross-cultural connection Wilde maintained between his homeland and France are too extensive to discuss at length here, but let it suffice to say that Wilde was a prolific reader of French novels, that his works have been widely translated into as well as read and performed in French—even throughout Wilde's lifetime[22]—and that scholars have often colored the Irishman as much more of a French

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22 See also Evangelista, *The Reception of Oscar Wilde in Europe* for a complete list of first translations, significant retranslations, important works of criticism, and works and adaptations inspired by Wilde in each European country.

author than a British one.[23] Wilde even deemed himself to be French in many ways: "Français de sympathie, je suis Irlandais de race, et les Anglais m'ont condamné à parler le langage de Shakespeare" (French by sympathy, I am Irish by birth, and the English have condemned me to speak the language of Shakespeare) (Evangelista 1). Similarly, the British associated Wilde with the French and Frenchness because of his sexuality, style, and cosmopolitanism.

THE FRENCH FAKE AND THE BRITISH

In the nineteenth century (if not before), Frenchness proved to be a signifier for the fake within the British imagination, as we clearly see both in Wilde's texts and throughout Victorian literature. For example, the appearance of the mysterious yellow tome, or "poisonous French novel," understood to be Huysmans's *A Rebours* (1884) in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* both initiates and indicates Dorian's falseness, depravity, and degeneracy. Reading Huysmans's Decadent text causes Dorian to embrace an Aestheticist approach to life; in other words, he seeks the beauty and pleasure of artifice not only in art, but all around him and in his choice of actions. In this sense, *A Rebours* serves as a sort of *mise en abyme* in Wilde's novel to represent Dorian's corruption and descent via his search for the pleasure of artifice. In innumerable other British novels, falseness, depravity, and degeneracy are associated with the French and vice-versa. For

[23] Jacques de Langlade, via his title, *Oscar Wilde, écrivain français*, makes the argument that Wilde was indeed more French than British and as French as any French author.

example, Englishwomen such as Becky Sharp in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* who read French novels—which are always considered "poisonous" in British texts—are untrustworthy or often corrupt, and their femininity and sexual purity are questioned. Englishmen such as Robert Audley in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* who do the same are considered dandies, and their interest in women is even a subject of scrutiny. The mere act of reading a French novel within a British novel positions characters as sorts of "fake" women or men: one cannot trust that their identities, specifically their gender identities, are what they appear to be.

Furthermore, women with "French" backgrounds such as Ginevra Fanshawe in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*[24] and Becky Sharp, the daughter of a French opera girl, are characterized as theatrical, coquettish, and materialistic tricksters. Brontë's protagonist, Lucy Snowe, discovers that Ginevra holds the secret to the novel's gothic mystery. A nun's ghost has haunted Lucy throughout the text; however, this figure turns out to be not a ghost, but rather, a man named de Hamal disguised in order to visit Ginevra, with whom he elopes. With her contrived, French-peppered English and false airs, Ginevra cannot be trusted. Even a character such as Lady Deadlock's French maid, Hortense, in Dickens's *Bleak House* is suspect and turns out to be a murderess. This concern within British literature about French women furthers illustrates the call to treat the feminine fake in the mid- to late-nineteenth century within a cross-cultural context.

The British distrust of all things French and the anxiety about French falseness extend far beyond the Victorian novel. Napoleon, for example, becomes a trope for

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[24] The novel takes place in what Brontë calls Labassecour, a stand-in for Belgium, which is treated as synonymous with France.

French treachery and an immense source of anxiety within the British political realm, as I discuss in my treatment of *Vanity Fair* and Thackeray's alignment of Becky with the French emperor in Chapter III. Furthermore, this distrust of Frenchness and its association with inauthenticity is particularly revealing in British theatre criticism of the nineteenth century: William Hazlitt, for example, in his essay "Madame Pasta and Mademoiselle Mars" (1825) strongly (if paradoxically) condemns the false theatricality of French acting. Indeed, he contrasts the artifice of the French Mademoiselle Mars's acting with the natural style of Madame Pasta, a stand-in for the artless British actress, and whom Hazlitt describes as "Italian, and she might be English" ("Madame" 324). Through this juxtaposition of the two actresses, Hazlitt solidifies the British association of the French with all that is fake, artificial, contrived, or affected and firmly situates Englishness as its opposite—apparently true, natural, authentic, and artless. Though he specifically criticizes Mademoiselle Mars's acting throughout the essay—she is self-conscious and affected like most French actresses, though apparently superior in her talent—, Hazlitt consistently condemns the French character as a whole:

> It is this theatrical or artificial nature with which we cannot and will not sympathise, because it circumscribes the truth of things and the capacities of the human mind within the petty round of vanity, indifference, and physical sensations, stunts the growth of imagination, effaces the broad light of nature, and requires us to look at all things through the prism of their petulance and self-conceit. The French in a word leave *sincerity* out of their nature…[,] cut down the varieties of feeling to their own narrow and superficial standard, and having

clipped and adulterated the current coin of expression, would pass it off as sterling gold.[25]

As Hazlitt illustrates here, French nature is characterized as counterfeit in the British imagination throughout the nineteenth century, especially when contrasted with all that is British, and therefore, "natural."

The relationship between Britain and France over the centuries has been tremendously complex, and at times, unsettling, and it has influenced each nation's respective cultural conception of the other. As Robert and Isabelle Tombs point out in *That Sweet Enemy: The French and the British from the Sun King to the Present*, France and Britain's "intense and troubled relationship…is one of the most intense, most troubled, and most significant of modern times….The Norman Conquest began a close but fraught connection with the Continent…and laid early foundations of national pride, resentment and identity."[26] These foundations laid in 1066 continue to influence British views of the French and French views of the British today. While the boundaries of the two nations have shifted over the centuries, and indeed *whom* we call French and British has changed, the respective identity of each country and its peoples has necessarily been shaped largely in relationship to its counterpart across the Channel (Tombs 2). I postulate that the British maintain such a sense of anxiety about Frenchness and fakery, in large part, because they are uneasy about the ubiquitous French influence on their own

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25 Hazlitt, William, "Madame Pasta and Mademoiselle Mars" *Complete Works of William Hazlitt* Vol. 12 (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1931).

26 Robert and Isabelle Tombs, *That Sweet Enemy: The French and the British from the Sun King to the Present* (London: William Heinemann, 2006) 1.

history and culture and what this says about the authenticity of their British national identity, their very sense of self. Indeed, as Stuart Semmel points out in *Napoleon and the British*, "Though many Britons demonized Napoleon, their hatred was often tinged with anxiety and doubt about their own nation's condition….For a great many observers, both friend and foe, Napoleon served as a lens through which to scrutinize Britain's own identity, government, and history."[27] The British perpetually define themselves as what they are not, or rather, what they *hope* they are not. The centuries of contact with the French, and even years of *being* French after the Battle of Hastings, have instilled an identificatory paranoia that we often see in British literature and culture.

While this unease about the French—French theatre and art, French novels and language, French women, even Napoleon—pervades Victorian culture, feelings emanating from the other side of the English Channel are drastically different and perhaps may not even be characterized as "anxiety." According to Tombs and Tombs, British national identity appears decidedly more problematic than that of the French. They write,

> The idea of 'the French' seems to pose no problem. They know who they are, and so does everyone else. Yet the boundaries of France, and even the meanings of 'Frenchness', are not eternal. That Strasbourg is a French city, and that Brussels and Geneva are not; that Corsicans speak French rather than English; that the French are seen as urbane yet close to the soil…; that *steack-frites* is the evocative national dish—all these characteristics…owe much to contact with the peoples we

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27 Stuart Semmel, *Napoleon and the British* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2004) 2.

> will often refer to as 'the British'. This collective appellation is more of a problem. Some historians believe that the very idea of 'the British' was invented in order to fight the French. What were called 'The Three Kingdoms (England and Wales, Scotland and Ireland) became in stages 'The United Kingdom' as a direct result of war with France. (2)

While the French "know who they are" and are seemingly secure in their identity as French, we find the British to be constantly defining themselves *against* the French,or as "not French." Yet if the French are less obviously obsessed with the Anglophone Other, feelings about the relationship between the two countries are, while perhaps lopsided, nonetheless not one-sided. As Tombs and Tombs note in their conclusion, "Until recently, it was commonplace to claim that it [the struggle between Britain and France] was only a British, or English obsession—silly xenophobia which the French regarded with lofty indifference" (699). French writers, though less frequently, do express concern about British identity (though not necessarily about French identity) through treatment of British characters in their works.

Whereas French characters in nineteenth-century British works are usually untrustworthy, corrupt, suspicious, and of questionable sexual or gender identity, the French tend to characterize the occasional British characters appearing in their literature as comically unintelligent and vapid. For instance, Maggy in Georges Feydeau's *Le Dindon* (1896) is such a character: her spoken French is positively laughable, making her the subject of many jokes in the play. In Act I, Scene 13, she explains to Vatelin that she has come from London to Paris, where she wants to continue the very brief affair they

had while he was visiting London: "Quand je souis arrivée cet matin, j'ai tout de suite écrivé a vous…et pouis et pouis…j'ai pas envoyé la lettre…je mé souis disé il répondra peut-être pas à moâ…j'ai jeté mon lettre à la panier…et j'ai pris un hansom…Aoh! Comme est difficult…la rue de vous pour trouvéi…Je sais pas, le cocher comprenait pas le françéi..."[28] Her complete lack of mastery of the French language and her gross misunderstanding of her relationship to Vatelin as well as, in a sense, of the social conventions that surround her, render her ridiculous. She, like her compatriots in French texts, utterly fails to assimilate herself into French culture and is oblivious of how she stands out. While such British characters are thus portrayed to lack education, culture, and good breeding in these novels and plays, the French simply do not portray them vis-à-vis the fake. In other words, French concern about their relationship with the British does not appear, particularly in the French literary imagination of the 1800s, to be so tied up with the French sense of self and concern about the authenticity of French national identity. We see throughout the written works in my study a dialogical relationship between the two nations and the ways they conceive of one another that undeniably sheds light on the formation of their respective identities. The complexity and undeniable import of the French-British relationship and the effects mutual contact between the nations has had on their respective senses of self[29] necessitate a comparative study such

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28 Georges Feydeau, *Le Dindon* (Paris: Livres de Poche, 1999) 52.

29 As Tombs and Tombs claim, "[T]his relationship is unique in the modern world, not only for its duration and the breadth of its cultural, economic and political ramifications, but also for its global consequences. By these measures it is more important than any other relationship France or Britain has had—with Germany, for example, or America. We would go further and say that it has been heavier with

as mine which juxtaposes Britain and France and considers the pervasiveness of the fake and its relationship to identity in the literature and culture of the two countries during the nineteenth century.

DEFINING THE FEMININE FAKE

Through an examination of manifestations of the feminine fake from 1847 to 1886, I argue that the impulse to regulate, understand, and contain the feminine fake becomes apparent in French and British texts throughout the period. Indeed, because the feminine fake had the potential to reveal the constructedness of identity, and specifically, gender, to an audience who traditionally conceptualized gender as binary, innate, and stable, the feminine fake proved to be a threat to social structures and contemporary ideologies surrounding gender and identity. While neither the fake nor, in particular, the feminine fake, is a new phenomenon, it takes on new valences during this period and sheds light, as I demonstrate, on the shifting ideologies of gender at play as well as on the burgeoning conception of the constructedness of identity and gender during the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Looking at the feminine fake in three male-authored novels alongside one female-authored novel and two periodicals written for women in Britain and France during the mid- to late-nineteenth century, I consider the various urges

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consequences than any other relationship between two countries in modern times. It is scarcely possible to imagine what each might have been like without the other. Their political systems, their economic characteristics, the size and composition of their diverse populations, their ideas and national sentiments have all been profoundly altered and shaped by mutual contact since the 1680s" (699).

manifested therein to rein in feminine identities that do not fit traditional notions of womanhood, middle-class identity, and Englishness or Frenchness, thanks to their engagement with fakery.

The feminine fake, as I characterize and treat it here, contains a broad assemblage of objects, concepts, and even bodies that are perhaps as elusive as the uncontainable female identity it encodes. Thanks to its very nature as deceptive and illusory, the feminine fake is itself difficult to decipher and define; indeed, it is this "undefinability" of the feminine fake and related terms essential to this project, such as authenticity, that is at the nexus of my critical interrogation here. The Oxford English Dictionary gives the following definition, which originated in 1775, of "fake,": "An act of 'faking'; a contrivance, 'dodge', trick, invention; a 'faked' or 'cooked' report…[;] 'a counterfeit person or thing.'"[30] Among its 1835 definitions for *faux*, the sixth edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* gives, "Qui n'est pas veritable, qui est trompeur, contraire à la vérité, à la réalité…[,] Qui est pastiche, ou feint, contrefait, simulé…[;] Faux se dit pareillement des personnes qui ne sont pas ce qu'elles semblent ou ce qu'elles disent être"[31] [That which is not true, which is deceptive, against the truth or reality…(,) That which is pastiche, feigned, counterfeit, simulated…(;) 'Fake' is also used to refer to people who are not what they seem to be or say they are]. The French definition of *faux* further gives the connotation of something that is inexact or irregular, as in *calcul faux* or *vers faux*; the term could also imply something that is not as it should be, as in *faux pas*

30 "Fake, n2," *The Oxford English Dictionary,* 2013, Web, 3 Jan. 2013.

31 "Faux," *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française, 6th Edition (1835),* Dictionnaires d'autrefois, The ARTFL Project, Web, 7 Jan. 2013.

(*Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*). I focus here on all three aspects of the fake outlined in the above *OED* definition, especially in its intersections with the French definition in use in the mid-nineteenth century, considering the fake as a fraudulent person or thing, such as Lady Audley or a *faux* cashmere shawl, as well as a trick or tool, such as makeup or costume, used by such a person. Finally, I highlight in my project the *act* of faking, in other words, the fake both as an action, but also, as a theatrical moment. Indeed, the texts I examine here are replete with performances, particularly of identity and gender, and the relationship between theatricality and authenticity reflects exactly the type of paradox I examine through the fake.

I home in on the feminine fake to analyze the changes in perceptions of identity, and specifically gender, during the mid-to late-nineteenth century. As I mentioned in my above discussion of the British perception of the French as inherently fake, the French fake is often gendered feminine in British eyes, so it is appropriate that the *feminine* fake be at the center of this work. Finally, it is worth mentioning in my definition of the feminine fake that, while the fake and authenticity seem to be intrinsically at odds with one another, they turn out, in actuality, to be more closely related than they first appear. This very paradox is at the heart of my project as I interrogate the breakdown of conceptions of stable identity during the mid- to late-nineteenth century, and, perhaps also, the breakdown of notions of authenticity itself at the time.

Contemporary scholars working on the fake, such as Rebecca Stern, Sarah Malton, and Scott Carpenter have experienced similar difficulties in delineating and limiting their subjects to those I have faced. The fake boasts a similar theoretical,

literary, and cultural ancestry to that of related themes such as domestic fraud, forgery, and fraudulence, subjects on which Stern, Malton, and Carpenter, respectively, have recently written. The apparent "undefinability" of these terms and other scholars' treatment of this problem inevitably color my work on the fake. Stern, Malton, and Carpenter all situate their subjects, regardless of what they name them or how they specifically define (or fail to define) them, as disruptive, even threatening, and revelatory of a widespread cultural preoccupation with authenticity and inauthenticity in nineteenth-century society. Stern highlights the Victorian obsession with fraud and describes the phenomenon through which both fraud and the social fixation upon it infiltrated the British home. For example, she discusses the mania for the case of the Tichborne claimant, an Austrialian butcher who maintained that he was heir to the estates in Hampshire and whose case was "the longest in British legal history…, generat[ing] an abundance of printed materials, including ballads, cartoons, melodramas, alphabets, and parodies."[32] In her study of forgery, Malton notes that forgery was considered so threatening that, until the 1832 and 1837 Forgery Acts, it was a capital offense for which a tremendous number of individuals were put to death during the first part of the century.[33] Malton further explains,

> [T]he recurrence of forgery in narratives that date well beyond the crime's elimination from the nation's list of capital offenses—from Compeyson's forgery

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32 Rebecca Stern, *Home Economics: Domestic Fraud in Victorian England* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2008) 16.

33 Sara Malton, *Forgery in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture: Fictions of Finance from Dickens to Wilde* (New York: Palgrave, 2009) 2.

> network in *Great Expectations* (1861) to Hyde's suspected forgery of Jekyll's checks in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886)—also registers broad unease about the authenticity of an individual's claims to moral and economic credit amidst and expanding and unstable monetary and social network. (2)

Like Stern and Malton, I define the fake as a disruptive force; in all of the texts that I treat in the pages that follow, the feminine fake threatens to upset the seemingly stable conception of identity and gender during the mid- to late-nineteenth century and thus provokes a drive to contain it so that the fake no longer upsets the legibility of feminine identity.

Two late-twentieth-century scholars whose theories of the fake have influenced my readings are Umberto Eco, in his 1975 essay, "Travels in Hyperreality," and Jean Baudrillard in his 1981 book *Simulacres et Simulation*. The former author defines the hyperreal as a fake that somehow exceeds, replaces, and becomes apparently more real than reality. Eco explains that the hyperreal is supposed to function as a sign of the real, wherein, however, the "signness" of the sign is completely erased. Describing the full-scale reproduction of the Oval Office at the Lyndon B. Johnson Library in Austin, Texas (apparently built "using the same materials, the same colors, but with everything obviously more polished, shinier" [6-7]), Eco elucidates the operation of the hyperreal: "Absolute unreality is offered as real presence. The aim of the reconstructed Oval Office is to supply a 'sign' that will then be forgotten as such: The sign aims to be the thing, to abolish the distinction of the reference, the mechanism of replacement" (7). Similarly, the simulacrum, according to Baudrillard, replaces the real and reveals that the real never

existed in the first place. He argues, "[T]he era of simulation is inaugurated by the liquidation of all referentials…. It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real…" (2). Both Eco and Baudrillard describe, even lament, the twentieth-century phenomena such as mass commercialization that caused the hyperreal and the simulacrum to ferment and rise to power. And yet, as I argue, if we turn back another hundred years, we also find moments in which the fake emerges and reveals "reality" and human perception thereof to be nothing but a sham. The feminine fake, like the simulacra and the hyperreal, "liquidat[es]…all referentials" to reveal gender and identity as mere performances that do not refer back to any preexisting, static notions of gender and identity.

Stern's recent work, *Home Economics: Domestic Fraud in Victorian England* (2008), "examines how economic dishonesty permeated widely held conceptions of public and private life, personal value, work and familial roles, and the character of intimate relationships" (18). Fraud in Victorian England, she argues, functions as an unsettling and disruptive force that consistently topples Victorian binaries long taken for granted, such as that of the public and private spheres. In this study of Victorian domestic fraud, Stern reveals that the "ideology of separate spheres" is indeed simply an ideology (4), and fraud seeps through the imaginary divide between the marketplace and the home to permeate Victorian private life. The home, in fact, functioned as a veritable marketplace for Victorians. Stern focuses in her various chapters on the employment of servants, food adulteration, divorce and marriage fraud cases, and child rearing. Finally,

Stern also notes that fraud is a complex and loaded term that has historically been undefined in a specific manner by the British legal system.

Published shortly after Stern's book, Malton's *Forgery in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture: Fictions of Finance from Dickens to Wilde* (2009) also treats the subject of economic and legal falseness in nineteenth-century Britain and highlights its invasion of the nineteenth-century British cultural consciousness. In her study, Malton situates forgery as a critical preoccupation of the Victorian popular imagination but moves away from the private sphere, which is Stern's focus. Malton suggests that scholars shift from a consideration and analysis of forgery as an aesthetic concern (for example, the focus on eighteenth-century literary forgery), which has historically been at the forefront of studies of the subject, to an examination of forgery as an economic and criminal concern. In her work, she aims to elucidate how forgery became and remained a major Victorian theme with complex cultural implications. Malton explains that the seeming obsession with forgery in nineteenth-century literature stems from the vast changes in the financial landscape of Victorian England, including the "movement to an economy based on fixed wealth, on the ownership of land, to one centered on intangible capital and an expanding financial network of banking, credit, and forms of exchange that forgers could readily exploit" (4). Seeking as well to elucidate how forgery is linked to issues of legitimacy and origin within nineteenth-century British literature and culture, Malton asserts, "In an economy where forgery thrives, visibility is no longer the key to ways of knowing. Forgery comes to embody growing concerns about the legibility of an individual's moral and economic legitimacy,…[which] perpetually haunts Victorian

fictional and financial economies" (6). Forgery, therefore, sheds light on the impenetrability of appearances during the Victorian Era, and specifically, on the illegibility of a person's moral status or social class. A provocative final note about *Forgery in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture* is that, in Rebecca Stern's review thereof, she critiques Malton's text for not having provided "a more bounded definition of forgery" (171), citing the challenge of creating a definition of forgery distinct from the much broader term, "fraud."

In a third recent work on the subject, *The Aesthetics of Fraudulence in Nineteenth-Century France: Frauds, Hoaxes, and Counterfeits* (2009), Carpenter dissects the construction of falseness as part of the French aesthetic discourse of the century. His work returns to the aesthetic treatment of falseness from which Malton urges theorists to move away; however, he looks at fraudulence not as a mechanism of literary production, but rather, as a subject of writing. Examining nineteenth-century French texts of a variety of genres including the novel, poetry, journalism, caricature, and history, Carpenter exposes fraudulence as a widespread theme in nineteenth-century French culture. He claims that, all in all, "[t]his synecdoche of the cultural landscape [fraudulence] suggests the generality of the phenomenon: it appears everywhere in order to challenge the urgency of authenticity."[34] The arrival of Romanticism in France, he argues, raised authenticity to a new position of importance during the nineteenth century, thus endowing fraudulence with a particularly sensational connotation and allowing it to thrive (10-11). In the introduction to his work, Carpenter tackles the "lexical slippage"

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34 Scott Carpenter, *Aesthetics of Fraudulence in Nineteenth-Century France: Frauds, Hoaxes, Counterfeits* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009) 18.

(2) of his key term, "fraudulence," enumerating potential synonyms of the words in his subtitle: "falseness, the false, artifice, ruse, simulacrum, and even fiction itself…, spoofs, deceptions,…monkey business, mystifications, [and] impostures" (2). He confesses to having struggled with defining or, establishing the boundaries of "fraudulence," which "is precisely that which subverts or blurs boundaries, effacing the distinctions between what is and what is not" (4). Ultimately, he characterizes fraudulence as deceptive, intentional, and potentially multiple, claiming, though, that the various authors he treats in his study each approach the fraudulent differently (4-5).

Within this project, I consider the multilayered implications of the appearance of feminine fakes—typically artificial, unnatural, and deceptive—within fiction, while remaining aware of the fundamental complications of writing "truthfully" about fakes within fiction. Certainly, the novel itself might be deemed a "fake" version of reality, often claiming to accurately mirror the world in which we live through the falsifying lenses of fiction and language. Indeed, as Carpenter articulates, "After all, what is literature if not a creation of a false world, an endlessly embellished untruth? As others have pointed out before me, literature (or, more generally, art) is always already a kind of fake, for it creates an illusory world in which its reader is asked, for a time, to believe" (2). This is all the more the case when looking, as I do in Chapter III, at nineteenth-century Realist and Naturalist novels, works with the stated goal of capturing and portraying contemporary life vividly and precisely, in other words, introducing the "real" into fiction. In his *Roman expérimental*, Zola depicts the novelist as a scientist and the writing of a novel as an experiment aiming to portray, know, and master reality. The

novelist pursues truth, or at least, *a* truth. He explains, "Puis l'expérimentateur paraît et institue l'expérience, je veux dire fait mouvoir les personnages dans une histoire particulière, pour y montrer que la succession des faits y sera telle que l'exige le déterminisme des phénomènes mis à l'étude….Le romancier part à la recherche d'une vérité"[35] (Then the experimenter appears and introduces the experiment, I mean to say, he makes the characters move in a particular story, to show there that the succession of events will be just as the determinism of the phenomena he set out to study demands). This need to comprehend and thereby master reality manifests itself not only in Realist and Naturalist fiction, but throughout the literature and culture of the mid- to late-nineteenth century, particularly as an impulse to regulate, understand, and contain the feminine fake.

THE PARADOX OF PERFORMING AUTHENTICITY

Recent scholarship on authenticity has noted the critical backlash against, or at least resistance to, authenticity by a wide range of postmodernists and poststructuralists. As Alessandro Ferrara points out in *Modernity and Authenticity*, such theorists "avoid using the term authenticity because to their sensibilities it conveys the illusory myth of a totalizing, harmonious, unitary self, which they seek to replace with the image of a

35 Emile Zola, "Le Roman Expérimental" *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Cercle de Livre Précieux, 1966) 1178.

fragmented, plural, centerless and irreconcilably split subjectivity."[36] In the past decade, scholars such as Lynn Voskuil and Elizabeth Outka have begun again to discuss authenticity in a more positive, or at least less skeptical, light. Voskuil, like Ferrara, contends in *Acting Naturally: Victorian Theatricality and Authenticity* that authenticity has fared poorly in recent theory and scholarship, particularly as, "The view of the self as an 'integer, impenetrable, perdurable, and autonomous' (to recall Trilling's vocabulary) can retain at best a limited value when the very ideas of stability, coherence, and unitary meaning are under fire,"[37] as they tend to be within postmodernist and poststructuralist work. She further notes that theatricality and performance have come to the forefront of recent scholarly writing, particularly on Victorian literature and culture, in order to "expose the grand narratives by stripping away their cloaks of authenticity."[38] In her work, Voskuil is decidedly less skeptical of authenticity than her contemporaries, and, as I describe below, reckons Victorian theatricality with the sense of authenticity that nineteenth-century British actors, audiences, and critics internalized.

Elizabeth Outka similarly attempts, in *Consuming Traditions: Modernity, Modernism, and the Commodified Authentic*, to "reintroduce the maligned concepts of authenticity and nostalgia. Only recently have literary and cultural critics been willing to

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36 Alessandro Ferrara, *Modernity and Authenticity* (Albany: State University of New York, 1993) 24-25.

37 Lynn M. Voskuil, *Acting Naturally: Victorian Theatricality and Authenticity* .(Charlottesville, UVA Press, 2004) 7.

38 Voskuil argues that, indeed, "Victorian literature and culture…are often viewed as more in need of the disruptive aid of theatricality than any others in English history…[b]ecause their subjectivity is often perceived to be the most bourgeois, their novels the most realist, and their culture the most unrepentantly capitalist" (9).

discuss these themes in anything but pejorative terms….Despite this renewed interest, when authenticity cavorts with that favorite bad boy, commerce, views on the relationship tend to sour."[39] However, authenticity seems to hold a position of great importance in our society today: Voskuil points out,

> As philosopher Charles Taylor has suggested, in fact, the idea of authenticity now occupies a firm place in popular culture far from the writings of Rousseau, Schiller, or Wordsworth [Trilling's paradigms of authenticity], a place that has reduced it to a form of narcissistic relativism….It can be discerned, for instance, in the familiar, injunction to be 'true to yourself,' the kind of popular wisdom dispensed daily by talk-show hosts and advice columnists. (6)

Taylor argues, in fact, "It's not just that people sacrifice their love relationships, and their care of their children, to pursue their careers. Something like this has perhaps always existed. The point is that today many people feel *called* to do this, feel they ought to do this, feel their lives would be somehow wasted or unfulfilled if they didn't do it."[40] Our self-help culture obsessed with DIY and makeover shows, all promising to transform individuals into the people they were "meant to be," positions authenticity as an essential human value, though one than can apparently be cheaply bought and sold. We seem to place a high premium on an authentic self we may somehow unveil, and yet, this underlying self waiting to be discovered can apparently be transformed into anything we

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39 Elizabeth Outka, *Consuming Traditions: Modernity, Modernism, and the Commodified Authentic* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009) 13.

40 Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1992) 17.

would like through a mere change in career, house, or physical appearance. Though thinkers such as Rousseau argued that society endangers and, indeed, sullies, our authentic selves, today, the authentic self is fundamentally linked to the "failings" of society, for example, vanity and artifice. In other words, today's purveyors of the authentic, who champion the motto, "Be true to yourself," sell an authenticity often dependent upon appearances and materialism, which is in contradiction with the deeply interior sort of authenticity about which Rousseau wrote. While our perception and definition of authenticity have changed drastically since Enlightenment thinkers such as Rousseau and Diderot wrote on the subject, during the mid- to late-nineteenth century, as Voskuil and Outka contend, it became a notion increasingly fraught with contradiction. Paradoxically, during this period, authenticity began to be seen as compatible with, or even a vital component of, seemingly antagonistic notions such as performance, which Voskuil treats in her work, and consumerism, on which Outka writes.

We see the concern about authenticity in the nineteenth century in works such as Hazlitt's "Madame Pasta and Mademoiselle Mars" and George Henry Lewes's "On Natural Acting" in Britain and Germaine de Staël's *De l'Allemagne* in France. The British theatre critics suggest that authenticity is a deep and internal quality that can be tapped into via the theatrical, and specifically, natural acting. Hazlitt explains the connection between natural acting and the authentic, or what he calls, "the height of the subject": "Natural acting is therefore fine, because it implies and calls forth the most varied and strongest feelings that the supposed characters and circumstances can possibly give birth to: it reaches the height of the subject" (335). The authentic and the natural

were closely linked for nineteenth-century critics such as Lewes and Hazlitt, and yet, authentic identity, inextricably connected to one's social identity as determined by class, nation, and gender, seems it should be at odds with the natural. Such is the paradoxical essence of authenticity during the nineteenth century. For Lewes, the natural or the authentic within the theatre is closely connected to the ideal. In "On Natural Acting" (1875), he explains,

> It is the actor's art to express in well-known symbols what an individual man may be supposed to feel, and we, the spectators, recognizing these expressions, are thrown into a state of sympathy. Unless the actor follows nature sufficiently to select symbols that are recognized as natural, he fails to touch us; but as to any minute fidelity in copying the actual manner of murderers, misers, avengers, broken-hearted fathers, etc., we really have had so little experience of such characters, that we cannot estimate the fidelity; hence the actor is forced to be as typical as the poet is. Neither pretends closely to copy nature, but only to represent nature sublimated to the ideal.[41]

That is to say, if an actor is to perform an authentic identity, he should not simply mimic nature, but rather, he should express an ideal identity that draws from natural examples, which all viewers can understand and with which they can empathize.

Hazlitt, on the other hand, argues that the authentic is indeed deeply rooted in nature; it is spontaneous, but not accidental. Further equating authenticity with the natural, he explains,

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41 George Henry Lewes, "On Natural Acting," *On Actors and the Art of Acting* (New York: Grove Press, 1957) 112.

> [W]e admire and applaud an actress accordingly, who gives these tones [of joy, sorrow, and other feelings] and gestures as they would follow in the order of things, because we then know that her mind has been affected in like manner, that she enters deeply into the resources of nature, and understands the riches of the human heart. (334-335)

Through the art of acting, then, an actor can access the very depths of humanity and authentic human identity. While the notion of performing an authentic identity or tapping into one's authentic self through the theatre may seem quite contradictory to us today, as Voskuil explains in her work, the possibility of this paradox was an intrinsic part of the Victorian consciousness.

In Staël's *De l'Allegmagne* (1813), she expounds upon the virtues of authenticity and transparency inherent in the German character and culture. She is credited with introducing Romanticism to France in this work "almost single-handedly," as Carpenter notes (11) and John Clairborne Isbell argues in his *The Birth of European Romanticism.*[42] Interestingly, like Hazlitt and others, she notes the artifice entrenched in the French culture and the blatant imitation for which the French are guilty, all while praising the Germans for their sincerity and truthfulness:

> [L]es Allemands ont en général de la sincérité et de la fidélité; ils ne manquent presque jamais à leur parole, et la tromperie leur est étrangère…Les Allemands sentir[aient] qu'on n'est fort que par sa propre nature, et que l'habitude de

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42 John Claiborne Isbell, *The Birth of European Romanticism: Truth and propaganda in Staël's* De l'Allemagne (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994).

l'honnêteté rend tout à fait incapable, même quand on le veut, de se servir de la ruse.[43]

[Germans are generally sincere and true; they almost never fail to keep their word, and deceit is foreign to them…Germans feel that one is only strong by dint of one's own nature, and that the long practice of honesty renders one incapable of trickery, even if one wanted to attempt it. (Carpenter 12)]

The German "transparency of character" (Carpenter 12) is essential to Staël's definition of authenticity. In other words, German personality, temperament, and identity are easily legible. Furthermore, Staël, like Hazlitt and in many ways, Lewes, links authenticity with the natural: throughout her treatise, she makes use of metaphors from nature and appeals to nature to support her argument. Finally, authenticity is at odds with imitation and the metaphorical barrenness of the classical model which Staël reprimands the French for copying within their art. As Carpenter points out, Staël's publication was particularly earth-shattering because it elevated authenticity to a new level of importance, paradoxically making room for the rise of fake in nineteenth-century art: "Fraudulence thus becomes all the more scandalous at times when authenticity is held in especially high esteem..." (11), such as during the rise of Romanticism, marked by the appearance of *De l'Allemagne*.

For my purposes, then, authenticity points to a stable, natural, and, most important, legible identity; furthermore, the authentic self can be accessed, whether it is through the theatrical, as Hazlitt claims, or through our day-to-day interactions.

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43 Germaine de Staël, *De L'Allemagne* (Paris: Charpentier, 1839) 19.

However, authenticity, like the fake, remains difficult to define, particularly due to its intersections during the nineteenth century with seemingly antithetical terms such as theatricality. Lionel Trilling's description of authenticity is apropos for my study: "[I]ts provenance is the museum, where persons expert in such matters test whether objects of art are what they appear to be or are claimed to be, and therefore worth the price that is asked for them—or…worth the admiration they are being given."[44] A great source of anxiety within the texts I analyze here is, indeed, whether people are what they appear to be. Moreover, questions of what is *natural* are of particular concern: is one's social class natural, or in other words, inherent? What about national or gender identity? As I demonstrate throughout this project, identity categories such as class, nation, and especially, gender, were often thought to be natural during the period in question. However, as I argue in Chapter II, authentic femininity was characterized by certain key qualities that, paradoxically, one might cultivate, such as good taste. The many apparent contradictions associated with authenticity and authentic femininity that emerge in my work and in the texts I discuss serve to unsettle not only cohesive conceptions of identity categories but also the very notion of authenticity.

The novels I examine in the pages that follow, such as William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1847-1848), present female protagonists who are marked by theatricality and performance. These women engage in feminine fakery but are simultaneously and contradictorily characterized by their authors as authentic or natural. Voskuil addresses this contradiction between theatricality and authenticity, taking up the nineteenth-century

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44 Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1972) 93.

performance theory of "natural acting" as her critical framework, and arguing that "in nineteenth-century England…theatricality and authenticity often functioned dynamically together to construct the symbolic typologies by which the English knew themselves as individuals, as a public, and as a nation" (2). Questioning the antagonistic relationship previously concretized between theatricality and authenticity, Voskuil claims that Victorians discovered the theatrical in the most seemingly authentic moments and situations and similarly "authenticated the spectacles they made of themselves" (3). Neither embracing nor rejecting the notion of the centered, unified self, she establishes that the authenticity/theatricality binary (or rather, non-binary, as she argues) was a vital part of Victorian identity-formation. Voskuil stresses that authenticity is, by its very nature, boundary-crossing and that it played a critical role in how the nineteenth-century British saw themselves and interpreted their relationships to the rapidly changing world around them. She likewise argues that this type of contradictory authenticity facilitated the formation of individual, national, and modern identities and helped British citizens understand and interpret these identities.

Along similar lines, Outka argues that the authentic could be and was commodified for late-nineteenth-century British citizens. Acknowledging contradictions in the relationship between the commodified and the authentic similar to the contradictions between the theatrical and the authentic, Outka, like Voskuil, begins her study with the nineteenth-century proponent of aesthetic artifice *par excellence,* Oscar Wilde, and proceeds to reconcile her terms with one another despite their apparent inherent incompatibility. Outka claims that late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century

marketing strategies sought to unite the notions of artifice and authenticity in order to create and sell objects that, despite and indeed *because* of the paradoxical nature of this union, appealed tremendously and broadly to turn-of-the-century British consumers (3-4). As Outka maintains, "The very idea of the commodified authentic—that one might unite desires for permanence… or for the absolutely original, with the promise that despite appearances such things might be easily remade, constructed, reproduced, and exchanged—was an astonishingly powerful paradox" (5). This paradox, she continues, "functioned as a critical tool within the culture" (5). Both Voskuil and Outka stress that authenticity is, by its very nature, boundary-crossing and that it played a central role in how the nineteenth-century British saw themselves and interpreted their relationships to the rapidly changing world around them. Each argues that the type of contradictory authenticity that she treats in her text facilitated the formation of individual, national, and modern identities and helped British citizens understand and interpret these identities.

The mid- to late-nineteenth-century feminine fake is implicated in these contradictory notions of authenticity and its intersectionality with theatricality. The fake, as I discuss it here, manifests itself as performative or theatrical. Using Voskuil as part of my theoretical framework for this project, I consider the feminine fake as both directly at odds with authentic femininity, and sometimes, a paradoxically compatible term as well. If, during the mid- to late-nineteenth century, one could witness the authentic in the performance and vice-versa, one could surely also see the fake in the authentic and the authentic in the fake. Furthermore, the idea that these dialogical terms are more closely related than they first appear supports my argument that the exposure of the feminine

fake reveals that authentic identity and gender expression might also be fakes. Such destabilization of terms helps us to see not only the emerging conception of the constructedness of identity and gender within nineteenth-century literature and culture but also to catch glimpses of authenticity within the feminine fake itself. As I argue in Chapter III, it is indeed possible to perform authentic femininity; in fact, authentic femininity may only be accessible via performance and theatricality.

The loss of faith in appearances that occurred during the period in question, distorting the legibility of identity, could only have come about during an era that had previously privileged the visible as the definitive means to the truth. What Martin Jay calls "the Enlightenment's apotheosis of sight"[45] in his *Downcast Eyes* dominated eighteenth-century thought about how individuals could truly come to know the world around them. Jay explains, "Descartes and the *philosophes* influenced by Locke…maintained a linkage between lucidity and rationality, which gave the Enlightenment its name. And both distrusted the evidence of the competing major sense organ, the ear, which absorbed only unreliable 'hearsay'" (85). Moreover, Rousseau linked the visual with the search for authenticity and selfhood: "[H]is ocular preoccupations evinced a passionate personal dimension. His search for transparency sought not merely to reveal the truth of the world, but also to make manifest his own authentic self" (90). Jay argues that the ocularity of French culture has waned in recent years, beginning as early as the end of the eighteenth century. The nineteenth century's preoccupation with and anxiety about the visible, which Vanessa Schwartz treats in her

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45 Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: U of Cal. Press, 1993) 93.

Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris, led to the loss of faith in appearances associated with the rise of the fake as well as with skepticism about reality and Realism. As Schwartz argues, in late-nineteenth-century Paris "representations proliferated to such an extent that they became interchangeable with reality….[L]ife in Paris became so powerfully identified with spectacle that reality seemed to be experienced as a show….At the same time, shows featured modern life, represented as realistically as possible."[46] Highlighting the importance of Realism at the time, Schwartz discusses Barthes's reality effect and explains, "The real is thus only an effect although it seems to precede its representation" (11). Moreover, Schwartz posits that reality was produced as an *effect* of representations available to the late-nineteenth-century Paris public such as newspapers' *fait divers* and serial novels, the spectacle of the Paris morgue, and wax figures and dioramas at the Musée Grévin. Reality, therefore, was shown to have a dynamic and intricate relationship with the spectacle or the fake during the era, much as the authentic and the performance, though seeming contradictory, turned out to be more closely related than they appear.

REALITY, REALISM, AND *L'EFFECT DE RÉEL*

We can better comprehend how the British and French understood the terms "reality" and "Realism" during the era in question by looking at writers such as Realist William Thackeray and Naturalist Emile Zola, whose novels I analyze in Chapter III.

46 Vanessa Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Berkeley: U California Press, 1998) 10.

Realism, like authenticity, lost much of its scholarly credit during the second half of the twentieth century. In his chapter, "Literary Realism Reconsidered," George Levine outlines several of the principles of Realism and utilizes *Vanity Fair* as a novel epitomizing these principles. He remarks that Realism is now regaining credibility after decades of disparagement at the hands of literary theorists, indeed the same theorists who, as Ferrara notes, have remained skeptical of the term "authenticity." Levine comments, "After the 1960s, the little credit that realism still had seemed to have been exhausted entirely by the radically anti-realist arguments of much of modern literary theory, according to which the very notion of representing 'reality' in any credible way was taken as reprehensible *naiveté* or simple bad faith."[47] Many Realist authors during the nineteenth century were apparently aware of this impossibility of ever truly faithfully representing reality that has so plagued poststructuralists and other recent theorists; hence, self-consciousness within the narrative is a typical feature of much of Realist writing.[48] Thackeray's narrative voice, authoritative at times, self-effacing at others, is replete with many of the other emblematic contradictions of English Realist fiction as well. From these incongruities in *Vanity Fair* emerges the ultimate Realist paradox: that authors such as Thackeray, seeking to portray the world simply *as it is*, rely so heavily on the representation of the performance or fake within their novels.

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47 George Levine, "Literary Realism Reconsidered, "*Adventures in Realism*, Ed. Matthew Beaumont (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008) *E-book Library*, Web, 8 August 2011.

48 See Levine for further discussion of the contradictions in Thackeray's realism, especially the self-consciousness of its narrative.

While Thackeray's Realism is replete with inconsistencies—its narrative self-consciousness, its engagement with Romanticism and idealism, its moral tenor—what holds it together is the very simple precept that what we see is real; the key tenet of Realism is that the visible world around us is more meaningful than any interior, psychological, spiritual, or supernatural preoccupations. Thackeray, like other English and American Realist authors, perhaps flouts the expectations of this genre for the same reasons that his writing boasts a moralizing and often satirical quality: he intends to expose that modern society itself is a sham. Furthermore, the preoccupation with the fake and performances within *Vanity Fair* may be linked to Realism's struggle to pinpoint the nature and development of identity: as Levine comments,

> But [Realism] is a mode that by virtue of its commitment to getting it right is in constant flux, changing its conception of the real with the movement of time, reimagining character and even selfhood, both in the context of the social conditions in which it must live and through the kinds of experiments with interiority that mark its history from Austen, to Eliot, to James, to Woolf and Joyce. (Levine 31)

Realism's "commitment to getting it right" thus allows for these contradictions within the genre and necessitates the treatment of performances and manifestations of the fake precisely because these inconsistencies and transitions are present in *reality*.

Like Thackeray, Zola found his subject matter in the rapidly changing political and social climate of the nineteenth century, in his case, Second Empire France. He explicitly set his series of twenty novels during this critical time period, mostly in Paris;

the effect of this authorial decision is that the books are and often have been read as social portraits of the époque. His characteristic detailing of splendid as well as pitiful domestic interiors, social gatherings from horse races to balls, men's and women's wardrobes, contemporary mechanical processes, Parisian geography and architecture, racy sexual encounters, and even the vilest scenes of human putrescence throughout the cycle creates Barthes's *effet de réel* and gives the reader what appears to be an authentic picture of Second Empire life. The works are rooted in the historical circumstances, social mores, and commodity culture of Second Empire France. Zola meant his Rougon-Macquart cycle to be a strictly scientific project, examining the effects of *race*, *moment*, and *milieu* on two familial lines, one legitimate—the Rougons—and one illegitimate—the Macquarts— of this French family during the Second Empire.

Zola elaborates on the principles of his Naturalism, clearly a child of Balzac's Realism, in *Le Roman experimental*. Zola's treatise on the Naturalist novel draws on the work of physiologist Claude Bernard and explicates his scientific method of disinterested observation and experimentation and establishes a system of utilizing this method in the composition of fiction. In this essay Zola, more specifically, elucidates the medical methodology of Bernard and demonstrates how the Naturalist author might apply Bernard's technique directly to humankind within contemporary society, portrayed faithfully and candidly in the pages of the experimental novel. Zola further contends in this text that Naturalist writers seek to represent the world around them realistically, merely by reproducing contemporary society within their novels: "Un reproche bête qu'on nous fait, à nous autres écrivains naturalistes, c'est de vouloir être uniquement des

photographes….L'idée d'expérience entraîne avec elle l'idée de modification" (18) (We naturalist writers are stupidly reproached for wanting only to be photographers….The idea of experimentation carries with it the idea of modification). In other words, while the Naturalist may indeed accurately portray contemporary society within his writing, this is not his only goal; introducing experimentation into the novel via the scientific method elevates the Naturalist author above his alleged role as mere re-producer of modern life and transforms him, like the doctor, into a scientist. Not only does Zola reproduce contemporary life in his fictional works, but he also acts on and modifies it therein. By first observing social phenomena, then experimenting upon it, the Naturalist writer is able to reduce the human mind and passions to a set of rules or mechanisms that we can understand in order to become masters over the world that surrounds us. Zola declares:

> [C]'est là ce qui constitue le roman expérimental: posséder le mécanisme des phénomènes chez l'homme, montrer les rouages des manifestations intellectuelles et sensuelles telles que la physiologie nous les expliquera, sous les influences de l'hérédité et des circonstances ambiantes puis montrer l'homme vivant dans le milieu social qu'il a produit lui-même, qu'il modifie tous les jours, et au sein duquel il éprouve à son tour une transformation continue. (25)
>
> [This is what constitutes the experimental novel: to possess the mechanism of human phenomena, to show the clockwork of intellectual and sensorial expression as physiology will explain them to us, under the influence of heredity and environmental circumstances, then to show man living in the social milieu that he

has himself produced, that he modifies everyday, and within which he experiences a continual transformation.]

Naturalism, according to these principles, seeks to expose the inner workings of human nature. With a commitment to "getting it right" much like that of Realism, Naturalism is in constant flux, even within a single novel, as it reveals the ever-changing and inconsistent nature of the social world and the beings within it.

Realism in Britain, Realism in France, and Naturalism in France are closely related but disparate literary traditions each allegedly in pursuit of the accurate representation of reality. In France, specifically within the Naturalist mode, Realism boasts a scientific or empirical quality typically lacking in British Realism, which, on the other hand, often displays a moralizing tone. According to Levine, English Realism generally "tends to be driven by a strong moral impulse…[I]t is no accident that realism tended to be the dominant mode of a Victorian England in which perhaps the greatest of all virtues, greater than sexual propriety, was truth-telling" (15). It seems, however, that neither Realism nor Naturalism could, after all, succeed at representing "reality" to the extent to which these authors purported to be able to do. As Barthes explains in his 1968 essay, "L'effet de réel," Realism and Naturalism's endeavor to represent reality faithfully and accurately always ultimately fails, for the work of art can only "connote," and never "denote," reality:

> [E]liminated from the realist speech-act as a signified of denotation, the 'real' returns to it as a signified of connotation; for just when these details are reputed to *denote* the real directly, all that they do—without saying so—is signify it…; in

> other words, the very absence of the signified, to the advantage of the referent alone, becomes the very signifier of realism: the *reality effect* is produced, the basis of that unavowed verisimilitude which forms the aesthetic of all the standard works of modernity.[49]

This "reality effect," produced by the accumulation of details within Realist and Naturalist texts, is the key to the relationship between reality and Realism during the period in question. It seems that, though the representation of reality, or that which can be seen, was a prime goal of a number of mid- to late-nineteenth-century British and French writers such as Thackeray and Zola, many were acutely aware of the paradox of the *effet de réel* in their struggles to represent the real. *Vanity Fair*, for example, paints an image of the vast social landscape of the early-nineteenth century, while remaining aware of the hopelessness of truly depicting the real; as Levine argues, "There is no novel more self conscious about the fact of its illusionism, about the difference between the claims of art and the claims of plausibility, about the inadequacies of omniscient representation in the efforts toward authentic representation of the real, than *Vanity Fair*" (20). Indeed, as Barthes posits, authors can never truly represent reality in their writings; they can only suggest or hint at it, give a feel for the essence or effect of reality.

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49 Roland Barthes, "L'effet de réel," *Le Bruissment de la langue* (Paris: Seuil, 1984) 148.

THE FEMININE FAKE AND THE STAKES OF FEMALE LEGIBILITY

During the 1800s, particularly in the first half of the century in Paris, writers attempted to place individuals—mostly women—into categories or social archetypes. The need for this was largely brought on by a variety of social, political, economic, and industrial changes during the nineteenth century, especially, in Paris, the frequent, radical, and sweeping changes in political dynasty. Priscilla Ferguson elucidates,

> The execution of one king and the defeat and subsequent flight of his successors in 1814, 1815, 1830, 1848, and 1870 dramatized the fragility of political authority. Having lost its central authority, the urban symbol system fell into disarray. Into this void, writers stepped with surprising assurance to assert the authority of the written word to interpret the modern city and the society that it both represented and expressed.[50]

What Victoria Thompson calls "spatial stories," that is, guidebooks, novels such as those by Balzac, and the many *physiologies* written during the period, became the means for interpreting a jumbled, confusing urban space and its intermingling citizens who hailed from every walk of life. In her "Telling "Spatial Stories": Urban Space and Bourgeois Identity in Early Nineteenth-Century Paris," Thompson notes, "Scholars have argued that these works attempted to provide a 'panoramic,' or all-inclusive, view of Parisian life, one that, through the classification of Parisians into easily recognizable social types,

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50 Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, *Paris as Revolution: Writing the Nineteenth-Century City* (Berkeley: U of Cal. Press, 1994) 47.

rendered the social hierarchy of the city 'transparent' or easily legible."[51] As Ferguson points out, the project of the nineteenth-century writer was to know and understand, usually just by seeing: she explains, "They [writers of the nineteenth century] all write from knowledge of some sort and, more important still, they write from a presumption of knowability. For them, the city is readable, and they write within this conviction of legibility" (7). The concern with rendering the city itself and the social hierarchy thereof transparent was closely linked to how easily one could classify individuals into these archetypes simply by looking at them, in other words, how legible an individual was. In Richard Sieburth's study of the *physiologies*, he writes, "[E]lles fournissaient…une reproduction de modèles familiers tirés de la vie moderne, destinés à rendre le champ tout entier de la diversité plus visible, plus lisible, en bref, plus accessible à leurs lecteurs"[52] ([T]hey provided…a reproduction of familiar models drawn from modern life, meant to render to entire field of variety more visible, more legible, in short, more accessible to their readers). The goal of the *physiologies*, however, as I demonstrate in this work, cannot succeed within many nineteenth-century French and British texts.

I focus on this legibility and its stakes in *Illegible Women*, equating legibility with readability and accessibility, that is, the possibility of knowing someone or something simply by looking, and therefore, being able to understand and master him, her, or it. The problem with legibility, however, as many scholars have argued, is that it is

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51 Victoria E. Thomspon, "Telling 'Spatial Stories': Urban Space and Bourgeois Identity in Early Nineteenth-Century Paris," *The Journal of Modern History* 75 (September 2003): 525.

52 Richard Sieburth, "Une idéologie du lisible: le phénomène des Physiologies" *Romantisme* 15.47 (1985) 47.

impossible to achieve. Just as reality can never truly be represented within the pages of Realist novels, the nineteenth-century world, and specifically its cities and their inhabitants, can never truly be read, understood, and mastered. Ferguson argues that legibility was a primary motive for the *physiologies*, but it largely failed. Similarly, Sieburth notes, referencing Walter Benjamin, that legibility is unattainable:

> Benjamin suggère que les *physiologies* et la "littérature du panorama" en général servaient à réduire l'altérité de la foule aux proportions de quelque chose de plus familier, à transformer son anonymat radical en un lexique de stéréotypes, procurant ainsi à leurs lecteurs l'illusion réconfortante que les conglomérats sans visage de la ville moderne pouvaient après tout être lus—et donc maîtrisés—comme un système de différences." (48)
>
> [Benjamin suggests that the *physiologies* and "panoramic literature" in general served to reduce the alterity of the crowd to more familiar proportions, to transform its complete anonymity into a lexicon of stereotypes, giving in this way their readers the comforting illusion that the faceless conglomerates of the modern city could, after all, be read—and thus mastered—as a system of differences.]

The key word in this passage is *illusion*: after all, the city's inhabitants cannot really be understood and mastered at a glance, but rather, they can only be reduced to stereotypes within such texts. Like the attempts of nineteenth-century writers to know and understand the city and its inhabitants, the attempts to contain the feminine fake within the texts I analyze here largely fail as well.

Though scholarship on legibility, social hierarchies, and the city has mainly centered on nineteenth-century Paris, similar concern has arisen in works on London. In her *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London*, Sharon Marcus notes that in the last couple of decades, domestic scholarship has focused on England, while urban scholarship has focused on Paris.[53] However, in this study, Marcus seeks the intersections between such work, often emphasizing the domestic in Paris and the urban in London. She explains that one of problems with London housing in the nineteenth century was that houses had been subdivided, thus creating the same problems of intermixing that "the British incorrectly attributed to Parisian apartments" (85). London's apartments, though they boasted façades of private, single-family homes, were often not divided and let in an orderly fashion like Parisian apartments, but rather, were separated by what architect William H. White called "sham party walls" (Marcus 85). The "social and spatial blending" (85) that occurred within such buildings led to many of the problems of hierarchy and legibility in London that Parisian *physiologies* and other spatial stories sought to remedy.

THE FAKE AND THE CULTURE OF *THINGS*

The effort to comprehend and control social phenomena, specifically identity and the feminine fake, within French and British texts of the period is reflected in the accumulation of detail and privileging of objects-cum-objects within these novels. Elaine

53 Sharon Marcus, *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century London and Paris* (Berkeley: U of Cal. Press, 1999) 4.

Freedgood asserts in *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* that, "cavalcades of objects threaten to crowd the narrative right off the page"[54] in Victorian, and more specifically, Realist novels. In her introduction, she discusses Roland Barthes's *effet de réel* and applies it to the Victorian Realist novel. As I show below, the seemingly superfluous or unmotivated details which Barthes asserts are responsible for creating the reality effect are frequently not extraneous to a novel's plot or to the novel's ideological treatment of identity and gender. Indeed, many examples of the feminine fake appear at first to be such unnecessary elements within a plot—various cosmetics, minutely detailed articles of clothing, and fashion accessories—but turn out to be pivotal *things* in the formation of the female protagonist's gender, class, and national identities.

Writers of the period highlight the *thingness* of feminine fakes, positioning and describing them equally as objects of exchange. The overpopulation of objects within these texts and the phenomenon of *chosification* in nineteenth-century literature and culture are key to my project because these trends, alongside the nineteenth-century culture of consumption and the linking of women and consumption in new ways, put the feminine fake in the spotlight during the mid- to late-nineteenth century. The transformations in shopping practices, or the ways in which consumers acquired these objects that proliferate in Realist and Naturalist texts as well as other novels throughout the century, were tremendous and affected consumers of all social classes, especially women. Krista Lysack explains in *Come Buy, Come Buy: Shopping and the Culture of Consumption in Victorian Women's Writing* that these changes in Victorian consumer

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54 Elaine Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things* (Chicago: U Chicago Press, 2006) 1.

culture resulted from "an expanded industrial and commercial age, including nineteenth-century developments in mass production and circulation, new practices in advertising, an increase in the flow of capital associated with imperial expansion, and the growth of the middle classes and their unprecedented access to expendable income."[55] Similar conditions across the English Channel equally revolutionized the nineteenth-century French culture of consumption.[56] As H. Hazel Hahn argues in *Scenes of Parisian Modernity: Culture and Consumption in the Nineteenth Century*, the rise in consumer culture in Paris occurred earlier than previously thought through revolutions in print media, retail techniques, tourism, fashion, and posters and marketing.[57] While Lysack reflects upon "how middle-class women's shopping after mid-century enabled a variety of cultural and discursive constructions rather than the prescription, imposition, and regulation of a single identity" (7) and strives to move behind the alignment of women with objects of exchange in her study, female characters, indisputably, are constantly and directly linked to and equated with objects of consumption in mid- to late-nineteenth-century texts. This latter formulation is limiting, according to Lysack (4); however, its veracity is undeniable.

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[55] Krista Lysack, *Come Buy. Come Buy: Shopping and the Culture of Consumption in Victorian Women's Writing* (Athens: Ohio UP, 2008) 6.

[56] For more on nineteenth-century French consumer culture, see also Rosalind Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France*; Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing, and Zola*; and Michael Miller, *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869-1920*.

[57] H. Hazel Hahn, *Scenes of Parisian Modernity: Culture and Consumption in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave, 2009).

Descriptions of women's possessions so often precede descriptions of the female characters themselves in mid- to late-nineteenth-century texts that it is frequently impossible to disentangle women as subjects and consumers from their objects of exchange. Authors of this period concerned themselves not only with the potential inability to depict reality, but also with the illegibility of women due to their augmented social mobility and changes in consumerist practices during the period. The apotheosis of the phenomenon of *chosification*, and specifically, the conflation of women and objects, appears in Flaubert's *L'éducation sentimentale* (1869), in which objects metaphorically hijack the narrative and become metonymies for people and relationships amongst them. Descriptions of Mme. Arnoux's clothing and surroundings, for example, are always privileged in the narrative, and thus, largely form the basis for Frédéric's obsessive fascination with her. In such novels, people, especially women, are perpetually equated with, displaced by, collected like, or made into objects. This conflation of female characters and things reflects the anxiety surrounding the legibility of women and the possibility of depicting them realistically during the nineteenth century. The feminine fake, after all, disrupts transparent readings of female identity within these novels and finally becomes a force that must be stopped.

Because of shifting social classes and social class markers, the increased expendable income of the middle class, and quick, easy access to consumer goods thanks to mass production and the department store, individuals in mid- to late-nineteenth-century Britain and France could often easily manipulate the outward show of their social class via their sartorial selections. Fashion was (and of course, still is) an essential tool in

the outward communication, and indeed, the manipulation, of identity. Mass production made clothing cheaper and more available even to the lower classes by the end of the nineteenth century; previously, clothes had, according to Diana Crane, "represented a substantial portion of a working-class family's possessions."[58] In her examination of fashion in France, Britain, and the US within *Fashion and Its Social Agendas: Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing*, Crane further argues, "In nineteenth-century industrializing societies social class affiliation was one of the most salient aspects of a person's identity" (4). Clothing during the nineteenth century expressed, above all, one's gender identity and social class; Crane claims that, by contrast, clothing signified in the twentieth century and continues to signify today a much wider spectrum of identifying aspects or social categories because of our "fragmented" society (9-10). Fashion, one of the many forms of the feminine fake I treat here, becomes a tool with which individuals, but especially women, could modify their external appearance, and often, like Lady Audley in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's sensation novel, re-imagine and reconstruct themselves.

Indeed, fashion during the nineteenth century was perhaps the most powerful mechanism for both communicating and manipulating one's identity and was not only representative, but also performative, as Susan Hiner claims in *Accessories to Modernity: Fashion and the Feminine in Nineteenth-Century France*.[59] According Hiner, in, "[The]

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58 Diana Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agendas: Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2000) 4.

59 Susan Hiner, *Accessories to Modernity: Fashion and the Feminine in Nineteenth-Century France* (Philadelphia: U of Penn. Press, 2010) 18-19.

two-sidedness of fashion, on the one hand its capacity to erect and maintain systematic hierarchies and on the other its vulnerability to co-optation and subversion of the hierarchy by 'social inferiors,' is a key to understanding the increased value of distinction in nineteenth-century France" (19). This quest for distinction gained import as a result of the shifting social class structure in France, and, I would add, in Britain, during the nineteenth century. The accessory, as Hiner emphasizes, and fashion in general, "became…ever more crucial tool[s] through which distinction could be produced and projected" (4). Fashion, accessories, and cosmetics were all sites for the pursuit of distinction during the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Authors during the period draw attention to such objects in their novels and emphasize the power these objects hold to allow female characters in particular to perform class identities otherwise out of their reach, or even *transform* their identities. These objects, as represented in the novels I analyze in the pages that follow, Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, Emile Zola's *La Curée* (1871-1872), Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), and Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *L'Eve future* are shown to permit the manipulation and performance not only of class identity, but also of a variety of factors seen to compose women's identity during the period, including good taste, domestic prowess, and, of course, femininity. The feminine fake thus appears in such novels and elsewhere throughout the culture of mid- to late-nineteenth-century Britain and France not only as a tool to facilitate the construction of female identity, but even more strikingly, as a means to both mask and subsequently reveal the process of identity production.

CONCEPTUALIZING GENDER IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: THE TWO-SEX MODEL

The political questions that arose during the period, particularly regarding women's enfranchisement, alongside a variety of work being performed in medicine, the sciences, and social sciences, forced nineteenth-century British and French citizens to consider gender in a new light. Nineteenth-century antifeminist discourse appealed to nature to deny women the rights men possessed, arguing that women were inherently unfit to work, vote, etc. Joan Scott elucidates in *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man*, "Debates about gender typically invoked 'nature' to explain the differences between the sexes, but they sought to establish those differences definitively by legal means. By a kind of circular logic a presumed essence of men and women became the justification for laws and policies."[60] Both British and French feminists, in turn, rejected such claims and sought to dismantle "natural" categories of gender difference as they fought to gain suffrage and equal rights. However, feminists equally reproduced the very categories of difference they endeavored to dismantle: "To the extent that it acted for 'women,' feminism produced the 'sexual difference' it sought to eliminate. This paradox—the need both to accept *and* to refuse 'sexual difference'—was the constitutive condition of feminism as a political movement throughout its long history" (Scott 4). Decades before late-twentieth-century theories of gender as a construct, nineteenth-century feminists grappled with the idea that gender difference could be disrupted, and gender difference itself was not natural. Equally, outside the

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60 Joan Wallach Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1996) ix.

scope of the political realm, authors and readers during the mid- to late-nineteenth century confronted the bewildering idea that gender might be culturally configured, not determined by nature, and thus, a social construct.

Throughout this project, I refer to "gender as a construct" with Judith Butler's work on the performance of gender in mind. Views on gender in the nineteenth century, of course, were not as radical as Butler's contemporary theories; however, I argue that authors and readers of the time were beginning to see gender as a social and cultural product, as Butler contends, rather than a category into which one is born. Indeed, she notes that she is "permanently troubled by identity categories, consider[s] them to be invariable stumbling-blocks, and understand[s] them, even promote[s] them, as sites of necessary trouble."[61] Identity categories such as gender in particular, but also class and nation, were likewise becoming stumbling blocks during the period in question for writers and audiences, specifically with the help of the feminine fake. Furthermore, Butler's famous formulation, "Gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original" (21), puts gender into a dialog with the feminine fake, which, like the hyperreal and the simulacra, is a copy of something that never existed in the first place. Butler's discussion of gender as performance can help us to understand how the performative nature of identity was beginning to be unveiled and understood during the mid- to later-1800s.

In "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," Butler tells a story about a recent conference she attended, explaining to colleagues beforehand that she was "off to Yale to

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61 Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," *Inside/Out*, Ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991) 14.

be a lesbian" (18). She describes the paradox of both being and becoming or performing a particular identity, here, her lesbian identity:

> How is it that I can both "be" [a lesbian], and yet endeavor to be one at the same time?...To say that I "play" at being one is not to say that I am not one "really"; rather, how and where I play at being one is the way in which that "being" gets established, instituted, circulated, and confirmed….[I]t is through the repeated play of this sexuality that the "I" is insistently reconstituted as a lesbian "I"; paradoxically, it is precisely the *repetition* of that play that establishes as well the *instability* of the very category it constitutes. (18)

Indeed, the repeated performances of identity and the very emphasis on performance within the works I discuss here similarly reveal the instability of identity categories to readers. As Voskuil points out, one "premise [of performance theory such as that of Judith Butler] emphasizes the repetitive acts of theatricality as the crucial demystifying mechanism by means of which the universalized authenticity of selves and narratives are parodied and shown to be conventionally contructed" (8). Indeed, the feminine fake manifests itself in and exposes the instability of identity categories through the repetitive acts of theatricality within the texts in this project.

Exposure of the feminine fake upsets the perception of gender difference that had solidified shortly before the period on which I am working. A dramatic reconceptualization of gender difference took place at the end of the eighteenth century and remained the dominant ideology throughout the nineteenth century. Before the late-eighteenth century, male and female sexual anatomy were thought to be homologous; in

fact, for almost two thousand years, no word existed for the ovaries, which, according to Thomas Laqueur, were considered the "organ that by the nineteenth century had become virtually a synecdoche for woman."[62] Instead, physicians often referred to the ovaries as "female testicles" and outlined what they saw as the extensive homologies between the male and female reproductive organs. In short, women's bodies were seen as inverted, inferior versions (or, I dare say, copies) of men's. During the late-eighteenth century, however, this conception of gender changed, and the one-sex, hierarchical model became a two-sex model wherein men's and women's bodies became incommensurable and opposing.[63] This perception of gender was understood to be based in nature and helped to shape ideologies used to keep women in their places socially, economically, and politically in both Britain and France during the nineteenth century.

The two-sex model for gender difference foregrounded women's roles as bearers of children and as mothers, and this ideological construct became the basis for excluding women from a variety of the privileges from which men benefited during the period. As Mary Poovey explains in *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*: "The model of binary opposition between the sexes, which was socially realized in separate but supposedly equal 'spheres,' underwrote an entire system of institutional practices and conventions at midcentury, ranging from a sexual division

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62 Thomas Laqueur, "Orgasm, Generation, and the Politics of Reproductive Biology" *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1987) 2.

63 Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1990) viii.

of labor to a sexual division of political and economic rights."[64] In her work, Poovey uses Laqueur's ideas to elucidate these assumptions about the "nature" of women and their inherent difference from men and to show how these assumptions infiltrated mid-nineteenth-century British life to such an extent that Victorians constantly reproduced this gender ideology in their lives. Pulling from discourses as varied as medicine, divorce law, and parliamentary debates, she argues that gender difference is a *social*, rather than *natural*, phenomenon. Poovey not only explores the "apparent coherence and authenticity" of the mid-nineteenth-century ideology of binary gender difference, but she also exposes "its internal instability and artificiality" (3). I thus keep in mind the constant revision and reconstruction of nineteenth-century gender ideology in my study of how the feminine fake was instrumental during the period in revealing to authors and audiences the constructedness of identity and gender.

While Poovey's text draws exclusively from the 1840s and 1850s in Britain for examples of controversies that shed light on the "uneven development" of gender ideology, women throughout the nineteenth century in a variety of contexts were subject to social, institutional, and political inequity based on inherent gender difference. Many arguments for barring women from citizenship, the franchise, property ownership, and other rights, were founded throughout the nineteenth century on the idea that gender difference was natural. As Scott explains,

> The exclusion of women was attributed variably to the weaknesses of their bodies and minds, to physical divisions of labor, which made women fit only for

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64 Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: U Chicago Press, 1988) 7-8.

> reproduction and domesticity, and to emotional susceptibility that drove them either to sexual excess or religious fanaticism. For each of these reasons, however, the ultimate authority invoked was 'nature.' And nature was a difficult authority to challenge. (ix-x)

Scott refers here specifically to the exclusion of French women from citizenship after the French Revolution and throughout the nineteenth century, but she may as well be alluding to the barring of women from the right to obtain a divorce or to retain ownership of their property after marriage, for women were denied these rights as well using the same logic. Both Poovey and Scott explore the rise of feminism, in Britain and France respectively, as an oppositional voice to that which advocated the exclusion of women from a variety of rights based on their "natural" differences from men. As Scott elaborates, French feminists "offered a critique not only of the uses made of ideas of sexual difference, but also of the very attempt to ground sexual difference authoritatively in nature" (xi). The paradox to which Scott refers in her title, of course, is that feminists continually reproduced "gender difference" within their work to dismantle such difference in order to obtain a variety of rights for women during the nineteenth century. She further explains that "feminists refused to accept 'nature' as an explanation for women's disenfranchisement when there was doubt even among scientists about how the natural field could be read: was its meaning transparent, or always subject to imperfect human interpretation?" (12). Nature, and specifically female nature, while invoked not infrequently in the nineteenth-century political arena, was apparently not as legible or decipherable as it may have at first seemed.

The goal of this project is not, however, to analyze and deconstruct the feminist discourses or the oppositional political rhetoric of the mid- to late-nineteenth century, but rather to consider, in light of these arguments, how ideas about the "nature" of female difference infiltrated British and French popular imaginations during the era. By examining periodicals and novels from 1847 to 1886, I explore how the feminine fake is a tool for studying the ways in which authors and readers were just beginning, unconsciously at times, to grapple with the discomforting idea that gender might not be fixed, absolute, or "natural," but instead, a mutable social construct. Here I study manifestations of the feminine fake in order to highlight the tension between the natural and unnatural vis-à-vis the construction of British and French femininity during the nineteenth century. Moreover, by demonstrating the construction and performance of 'deviant' femininities and illegible women such as Becky Sharp and Lady Audley, the novels in question inadvertently contribute to the destabilization of all gender identities for nineteenth-century audiences. Indeed, attempts within these works to understand, contain, and destroy the feminine fake had the paradoxical consequence of subverting the very binary they sought to solidify and demonstrated the fundamentally authentic qualities of fakery and identity performance that would be acknowledged and embraced at the end of the twentieth century. The unraveling and unveiling of identity and gender as shams serve ultimately to dismantle the very categories of the authentic and the fake.

Chapter II: Fashion, Accessories, and Feminine Façades in *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* and *La Mode illustrée*, 1866-1871

> Notre époque n'a plus ces belles fleurs féminines qui ont orné les grands siècles. L'éventail de la grande dame est brisé. La femme n'a plus à rougir, à médire, à chuchoter, à se cacher, à se montrer, l'éventail ne sert plus qu'à s'éventer, et quand une chose n'est plus que ce qu'elle est, elle est trop utile pour appartenir au luxe.[65]
>
> [Our era no longer boasts these beautiful feminine flowers who adorned the great centuries. The great lady's fan has shattered. Ladies no longer have to blush, bad-mouth, whisper, hide themselves, reveal themselves; the fan no longer serves but for fanning; and when something is no longer but what it is, it is too useful to belong to the world of luxury.]

Employing the broken fan to symbolize the downfall of *la grande dame* in "La Femme comme il faut," Honoré de Balzac laments the system of social values lost with her demise and that of the *ancien régime*. Balzac's striking use of the broken fan illustrates two critical points that the author hopes to make in this essay from *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*, Léon Curmer's immense panoramic enterprise that catalogued archetypes of French citizens in order to render urban life understandable. First, the ruined and now useless *éventail* demonstrates that the matrix of signs and

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65 Honoré de Balzac, "La Femme comme il faut," *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* (Paris: L. Curmer, 1840-1842) *La Bibliothèque Electronique de Lisieux* Web, 14 April 2011.

signifiers of the past centuries has deteriorated: in other words, things no longer are or mean what they once did. The infamously complex language of fans, the mastery of which was fundamental to one's identity as a proper aristocratic lady, not only has broken down, but has been rendered utterly useless by the destruction of its sartorial instrument. However, a new system has arisen in its place and will continue to evolve throughout the nineteenth century, based on a new social scheme beginning to reconcile itself with the idea that identity categories are perhaps not fixed.

Second, Balzac's choice of the fan clearly highlights the importance of fashion and the accessory in the manufacture of the concept of gender during the nineteenth century. The accessory, in this case the fan, becomes a metonymy for woman: the fan has been broken and devalued, just as *la grande dame* has dissolved into her bastardized self, *la femme comme il faut*. Like the strictly utilitarian fan, *la femme comme il faut* no longer belongs to the world of luxury. Accessories within Balzac's text and the periodicals I examine often become substitutes for their wearers because of how much they tell us about these female owners. Balzac gives his readers clues about how to distinguish *la femme comme il faut* ("woman as she should be" or "the right kind of woman") and *la femme comme il en faut* ("the kind of woman one should have") based on their sartorial selections and comportment but, like the writers of *La Mode illustrée* and *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, he is plagued by the increasing instability of gender and class markers during the period.

The difference between *la femme comme il faut* and *la femme comme il en faut* lies in the short adverbial pronoun, which indicates that the latter is the kind of woman

that a man *desires*, at least for an evening of pleasure, and the former is the sort of woman that a man *needs*, a proper lady whom he should seek in marriage. His titular archetype, *la femme comme il faut*, is a proper, bourgeois woman, while her lower-class counterpart, *la femme comme il* en *faut*, is usually a prostitute. These supposedly antithetical women *seem* easily distinguishable from one another because the former wears certain articles of clothing, always in good taste and, more important, wears them correctly, while the latter can only imitate *la femme comme il faut*. However, as Balzac explains, the two characters are not as different as they first appear, for *la femme comme il faut* is as marked by theatricality as her promiscuous double: *la femme comme il faut* is in fact but a poor imitation of the *grande dame* of years past. As I demonstrate in this chapter, Balzac's discussion of feminine distinction sheds light on how *La Mode illustrée* and *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* sanctioned and regulated taste, extravagance, and even spending in an effort to control increasingly illegible feminine identities.

(Re) Imagining Gender Via Fashion and the Nineteenth-Century Women's Periodical

During the late 1860s and early 1870s, issues of *La Mode illustrée* and *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* are fraught with anxiety about the proper performance of French and British middle- and upper-class femininity. The writers of these two women's periodicals make clear that it is indeed possible to *perform* authentic or legible femininity—that is, feminine identity decipherable via external appearance—

and advise their readers how precisely to enact such performances. Good taste, moderation, and economy are the quintessential values of authentic femininity in both nations. On the other hand, extravagance, specifically in dress, is framed as inauthentic and as the ultimate transgression for French and British women. *La Mode illustrée*, however, plays up the contradictions between performance and authenticity more directly and intensely, as I show below. This anxiety about performing authentic femininity becomes all the more apparent in both France and Britain as the turmoil of political events in France mounts, climaxing during the Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune.

Printed on opposite sides of the English Channel, the two publications differ remarkably; however, they target patently similar audiences and, together, demonstrate the role the feminine fake plays in the nineteenth-century conceptualization of gender as a construct. *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* ran from 1852 to 1879, when it then became *The Illustrated Household Journal* from 1880 to 1881. Samuel Beeton published the magazine, and his wife Isabella, author of the famous *Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management*, helped him manage the magazine until her death in 1865. While the periodical targeted the middle class, it perhaps also reached upwardly-aspiring members of the lower classes and upper-level servants.[66] It included fashion columns, fashion plates, patterns, short stories, recipes, poetry, a sort of women's trading post, and a variety of other material. As Cynthia L. White notes, Samuel Beeton's magazine is

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66 Megan Ward "'A Charm in Those Fingers': Patterns, Taste, and the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*" *Victorian Periodicals Review* 41.3 (2008) 250-251 Web, 19 May 2011.

perhaps considered "the first women's periodical to deal systematically with the subject of domestic management."[67] *La Mode Illustrée*, on the other hand, with the subtitle, *Journal de la Famille*, is domestic in nature as well, but more fashion-focused, and was likely intended to target a wealthier section of the middle class than its British counterpart that I discuss here. Written and published by Emmeline Raymond, *La Mode illustrée* reached 40,000 subscribers in 1860 and 100,000 in 1880.[68] Containing fashion columns and plates, fiction, rebuses, and other columns, it ran from 1860 to 1937.

Each of these magazines was read primarily in its nation's capital city and place of publication, but they both also boasted subscribers throughout Britain, France, elsewhere on the Continent, and in the US. Pamela Langlois gives an astute, though perhaps oversimplified, explanation of the divergences of British and French magazines during the late 1800s in her comparative study of French and British women's periodical publications: magazines such as *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* "put English women's journalism ahead of its French counterpart in the second half of the nineteenth century in terms of the quality and content of its articles, although the French continued to hold the lead in terms of fashion design and illustration" (45). Below, I delve further into how both of these mainstream, long-running, high-circulation periodicals directed at middle-class women during the mid- to late-nineteenth century, as well as women's

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67 Cynthia L. White, *Women's Magazines 1693-1968* (London: Michael Joseph LTD, 1970) 46.

68 Pamela Langlois, "The Feminine Press in England and France 1875-1900" Diss. U Mass. (1979) 339 Web, 15 March 2011.

fashion and accessories, played crucial roles in the manipulation of gender ideology in nineteenth-century Britain and France.

In order to fully understand how the feminine fake functions ideologically in the conceptualization of gender and regulation of feminine identities in nineteenth-century British and French women's periodicals, we must first analyze how gender ideology was created by, negotiated via, and played out in women's objects, especially feminine fashion accessories, as well as the periodicals themselves. The nineteenth-century women's magazine was not a supreme institution dictating a monolithic gender ideology to its body of passive readers. As Fraser, Green, and Johnston argue in *Gender and the Victorian Periodical*, "[T]he periodical press was not so much the oppressive organ of dominant ideology as a crucial site of ideological struggle, of those 'uneven developments' which Mary Poovey has so effectively analysed."[69] A variety of ideologies played out in the wide assortment of magazines intended for women in the nineteenth century as these publications participated in the construction of an array of femininities. Likewise, the discourse surrounding women's fashion and accessories within women's periodicals is a site of ideological struggle, and these accoutrements should not be overlooked or written off as insignificant. Susan Hiner claims, "Because of its trivialized status, the feminine fashion accessory could accomplish ideological work imperceptibly, both avowing and disavowing its connection to some of the most complex processes of modernity" (1). She argues that fashion, and specifically, women's accessories, became paths to social distinction during a period of increasing fluidity of

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69 Hilary Fraser, Stephanie Green, and Judith Johnston, *Gender and the Victorian Periodical* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 37.

class barriers. Clothing and fashion accessories, then, were tools implemented in the ideological processes of modernity, including the construction of gender.

Constructing Femininities: Gender and the Nineteenth-Century Women's Magazine

How expansive was the authority of fashion magazines and other periodical publications for women, and how extensively were female readers of these works influenced by and implicated in the gender and class discourses the magazines constructed? Scholars who have examined the nineteenth-century woman's periodical over the last two decades insist upon the complexity of the magazines' relationships to these discourses and upon the instability of the categories of gender, sexuality, and femininity within the publications. Margaret Beetham states in her introduction,

> I assume not only that the meaning of femininity was and is radically unstable but that its relationship to sexuality and the female body had to be constantly re-worked. I do not assume that the magazines imposed a socially constructed femininity on a natural sexuality or on already existing bodies, but rather that the meaning of these terms was dynamically related. (4)

Like Beetham and the authors of *Gender and the Victorian Periodical*, I consider the diverse and changing nature of women's magazines and their relationships to gender ideology in the nineteenth century and move away from earlier scholars' tendency to characterize these publications as dictatorial forces imposing one particular, repressive femininity upon their readers (Beetham 2). Even the readers of these magazines

supposedly directed at women are impossible to pinpoint precisely and thus render the relationship between author or editor and reader, as it is concerned with the construction of gender in the nineteenth century, exponentially more complex.

One of the limitations to studying the nineteenth-century periodical is the near impossibility of identifying magazines' actual readers. The readership of the nineteenth-century periodical press, and especially women's magazines, was expansive, yet indeterminate. Scholars might search for the "authentic" reader of the nineteenth-century women's magazine, but she (or sometimes *he*) is usually a construction. Periodical company records are rare, often incomplete, and usually give little information about readership other than names and addresses of subscribers or those who participated in magazine competitions.[70] Furthermore, periodicals circulated rapidly and were frequently passed around among readers; subscribers on record, thus, were not a magazine's only consumers.

The little concrete evidence for the identities of such periodicals' readers often lies in the magazines' published letters to the editors; indeed, some scholars have argued that the voice of "real" reader of the nineteenth-century women's periodical does resound within the letters columns. In "'Women in Conference': Reading the Correspondence Columns in *Woman* 1890-1910," Lynne Warren examines the relationship between readers and periodicals that comes to the surface within correspondence pages and analyzes the negotiation of readerly identity that also takes place therein. Warren asserts,

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[70] For further discussion of the real and implied readers of nineteenth-century women's periodicals, see also Warren 122-123.

> Because of the difficulties in obtaining information the concept of the implied reader is often substituted for the elusive figure of the real reader […]. The implied reader is a useful critical tool, but it offers only one way into a particularly complex problem. Implied readers are not, and never can be, anything more than approximations of real people. At the same time it is true that the notion of the 'real' reader is also problematical in the sense that all readers 'construct' themselves in the process of reading.[71]

When reading such letters, we must be skeptical that these writers actually are who they present themselves to be and that they are not simply figments of the editors' imaginations or products of the editors' textual manipulation. Periodical editors generally maintained a position of superiority over the consumers of their magazines, seeking to "diminish the power of the reader" (Warren 131). Aside from the typical editorial practice of modifying readers' letters (and, of course, selecting which to publish or respond to and which to omit), the pseudonymous publication of readers' letters in many periodicals further adds to the opacity of readerly identity.

The elusiveness of this periodical reader poses a particular challenge to scholars of the nineteenth-century magazine because the reader, as much as the writer or editor, played a key role in the development of gender ideologies during the period. How did readers influence, subscribe to, or resist ideas about femininity, women's domestic roles, and even women's political rights presented within these highly instrumental

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[71] Lynne Warren, "'Women in Conference': Reading the Correspondence Columns in *Woman* 1890-1910" *Nineteenth-Century Media and the Construction of Identities* Ed. Laurel Brake, Bill Bell, and David Finkelstein (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2000) 122.

publications? Fraser et al. propose that "to neglect the 'real' reader is to privilege the ideological positioning of the reader by and in the text, and diminishes our sense of readerly agency, of how the person turning the pages might have resisted, or at least participated in, that positioning" (69). I consider the "real" or "authentic" reader to the extent that it is possible to do so, especially as I analyze magazine columns, particularly fashion write-ups, which are often responses to specific inquiries of a periodical's readers. With the challenges that finding and responsibly discussing the "real" reader pose, however, I equally keep Warren's "implied" reader in mind in my study, while remembering that the latter is as much a product of my own fabrication and that of other scholars as the former is a construction of the nineteenth-century periodical reader, writer, and editor.

Periodicals' evident need to succeed financially further obscures and complicates the analysis of shifting gender ideology as negotiated within women's magazines during the period. Lest we forget, of course, these enterprises necessarily had to thrive fiscally in order to continue to sustain a readership and maintain an influence on their readers' lives and identities. Fraser et al. point out, "[T]he instabilities of a journal's gender politics, and particularly of its readerly address, are closely bound up with broader questions of its form and its cultural identity, and that these are by their very nature evolving and 'unevenly developing' as a matter of economic necessity" (66). A magazine's editor had to envision and create a precise gendered identity for its imagined unified community of readers in order to thus lucratively target this constructed group of individuals. The periodical then had to equally create a particular identity for itself:

according to Warren, "The success of a magazine was in large part due to its formulation of a textual or 'corporate' identity—inextricably linked to its successful appeal to its targeted audience, conveyed through the clues provided by title, cover design, editorial content, and so on" (123). In other words, a magazine had to construct and mold a fantasy public in order to cater to it by crafting and taking on a specific identity for itself as a magazine.

Periodicals often modified their offerings and format and even began to target entirely new audiences during the initial years after their debuts. A variety of magazines eventually altered their publications' forms or formats to redirect themselves to new target audiences who emerged from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. One such publication is the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*. In 1860 the enormously successful Beeton decided to issue it in a larger format, thus increasing its price in order to compete with all of the new magazines directed at women during the period (Fraser et al. 66-67). He also improved the quality of the paper on which the publication was printed and began to include imported colored Parisian fashion engravings in his magazine (White 46) to further enhance the caliber of the periodical and its readership. The identities of periodical publications as well as their readers are generally unstable and dynamic, and the "corporate identity" of a magazine is especially impermanent during the early years of publication due to market pressures (Fraser et al. 66).

The Waterloo Directory of English Newspapers and Periodicals, which chronicles these works from the nineteenth century, currently lists over 50,000 publications, and the readership of these publications was beyond measure. Cynthia White, in her extensive

study of periodical publications for women, *Women's Magazines 1693-1968*, lists by name 123 women's magazines published in Britain during the nineteenth century. This figure, of course, is an extremely limited approximation, and White emphasizes that her list only includes magazines targeting women exclusively; the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of titles omitted comprise "[f]amily journals and specialised magazines such as those dealing with maternity and child welfare, women's rights, […and] the organs of various women's associations" (304). From 1875 to 1900 alone, over 270 women's magazines were published in the two nations (Langlois vi). The nineteenth-century women's periodical in Britain and France had the potential to reach a tremendous number of readers. At mid-century, a popular women's magazine could sell tens of thousands of copies a month; for example, *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* had a monthly circulation of 50,000 magazines in 1860 (White 46). The number of copies a particular issue sold, however, actually tells us little about the extent of a publication's readership, as the number of readers a major periodical boasted greatly outnumbered the quantity of subscribers. The influence, thus, of such publications over female, middle-class citizens (and often others) of Britain and France was extraordinarily expansive.

The role, then, that nineteenth-century magazines targeted at women played in shaping how individuals during the period thought about gender and performed their gender identities is undeniable. Through its dynamic manipulation of a variety of prescriptive femininities, the nineteenth-century woman's periodical likewise revealed the constructedness of gender, even long before the appearance of arguably more provocative periodical publications (at least vis-à-vis their treatment of gender) from the

late nineteenth-century such as Oscar Wilde's *Woman's World*, with their "unsettling discussion of the fashioning of gender roles" (Fraser et. al 180). According to Fraser et al., "We are of course used to thinking about the 1890s as a time when high Victorian codifications of gender identity were irreversibly unsettled, but a reading of the periodicals of the previous six decades discloses the instability of the concept of gender as a binary category even as it was being more loudly declared" (Fraser et al. 7). Gender and gender roles were frequently deliberated within women's periodicals, including in both suffragist or feminist and other politically focused publications as well as, perhaps surprisingly, domestic or family and fashion magazines.

I base my argument in this chapter on Fraser et al.'s assertion that "the medium that most readily articulates the unevenness and reciprocities of evolving gender ideologies is the periodical press, which offers material realization, generically and formally, of that dynamic and relational cultural process" (2). Fraser et al. aptly apply Mary Poovey's theories of the "uneven developments" of gender ideology during the nineteenth century to their study and show how the nineteenth-century periodical was yet another system or institution, like those that Poovey analyzes, that functioned as site for the ideological work of gender. Poovey gives the term "ideological work" two definitions: both "the work of ideology" and the "the work of making ideology,"[72] and it is indeed appropriate to point out that both of these took place within the nineteenth-century periodical, and more specifically, the nineteenth-century women's periodical. Such publications were particularly instrumental in the cultural process of the uneven

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72 Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments* (Chicago: U Chicago Press, 1988) 2.

development of gender ideologies of the period because they served as a mediating link between the supposedly separate public and private spheres (Fraser et al. 5); moreover, it was in these separate spheres, as Poovey argues, that the binary model of gender opposition was naturalized as an essential building block for and instrument of nineteenth-century social, political, economic, and other institutions (Poovey 7-8). The nineteenth-century periodical targeted at women bridged a gap between readers, writers, editors, and others, as well between an assortment of topics of apparently unequal import covered within these publications, such as fashion, motherhood, and women's rights, and thus unsettled a variety of hierarchies of power that nineteenth-century women encountered in their day-to-day lives.

Periodical publications that served as vehicles for suffragist societies and other women's political organizations were the sites of critical ideological struggle during the nineteenth century. The women's press was a decisive tool in the fight for the franchise and other women's rights, as it provided a medium in which women, deprived of the right to participate in their government, could express their political and social views and values (Fraser et al. 152). Women were thus able to find a voice in the periodical press when their voices were otherwise denied a place in politics and social debate. Dozens of feminist publications, some more successful than others, were founded during the nineteenth century and through the Belle Epoque, from the Saint-Simonian *La Tribune des Femmes* in the early 1830s in France, to *Votes for Women*, founded in 1907 in Britain as the Women's Social and Political Union's newspaper. Debate about the "woman question" filled a variety of magazines hailing from across the political spectrum in both

nations, revealing that the periodical press was, without a doubt, a powerful instrument in the molding of gender ideology during the nineteenth century. Periodical publications with obviously political motives as well as apparently apolitical magazines were influential forces in debates about gender, sexuality, and femininity during the nineteenth century in Britain and France.

Many mainstream magazines on subjects traditionally considered more frivolous than women's rights likewise expose the preoccupation with the construction, as well as the challenging and unraveling, of ideas about gender and femininity during the nineteenth century, while carefully avoiding any reference to feminism. In France, fashion magazines and periodicals treating women's domestic duties generally evaded the "woman question" altogether and left the discussion of feminism to specialty magazines. Langlois writes, generalizing about women's magazines in both nations after 1875, "English magazines kept their readers abreast of the campaigns for women's legal and civic emancipation, and sponsored the improvement of their educational and professional opportunities […]. Similar agitation was virtually non-existent in France outside of feminist journals as, for historic reasons, feminism was regarded as a 'dangerous' doctrine" (vii). In fact, many periodicals in both nations, even those originally founded as feminist publications, had begun to carefully sidestep the "woman question" by mid-century when feminism[73] had become a significantly more prominent discourse.[74] As

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[73] The feminism (or feminisms) to which am a referring is, of course, of the nineteenth-century variety, which many in the twenty-first century would not recognize as feminism.

[74] See also Fraser et al., 148.

White explains, at the middle of the nineteenth century in Britain, "the leading periodicals for women were careful to avoid the whole subject of women's rights. Only the most casual references to feminist activities were made, and these were infrequent and invariably derogatory" (47). Many new magazines emerged during the 1850s; however, only a few feminist magazines remained in publication for more than a couple of years (White 47). The most successful and long-running magazines launched during this time were characteristic women's periodicals, that is, hodge-podge publications combining an array of material, from domestic advice and sewing patterns to fashion to short stories and poetry.

The *Journal des femmes*, a short-lived women's magazine of the July Monarchy, is typical of the feminine periodical press of the nineteenth century in its hybridity; moreover, its eventual double takeover by men and advertising, which stripped the magazine of its associations with feminism, illustrates why countless magazines deliberately avoided overt references to and associations with the "woman question" in order to maintain a lucrative readership. Cheryl Morgan claims that the *Journal des femmes* "is a case in point for more careful examination of the ways in which various issues—fashion, literary, and feminist—intersected and clashed within a given periodical"[75] and "argues that the *JDF*, despite its service to fashion and the political status quo, was feminist in its attempt to stake new territory for writing women" (209). The periodical began as an effort by Fanny Richomme and seventy female collaborators;

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75 Cheryl Morgan, "Unfashionable Feminism? Designing Women Writers in the *Journal des Femmes* (1832-1836)" *Making the News: Modernity and the Mass Press in Nineteenth-Century France* Ed. Dean de la Motte and Jeannene M. Przyblyski (Amherst: U Mass Press, 1999) 208.

it was advertisement-free and thus very expensive (210). Geared at educating its readers, whom the magazine "addressed […] as potential writers," the *Journal des femmes* printed articles by diverse feminine voices (instead of the usual, monolithic voice of a single editorial voice) using their real names and published a variety of reader responses (211). Two of Richomme's goals were to provide a space for women's writing and "to create 'the woman as befits the century'" (220).

Unfortunately, the magazine gradually surrendered to pressing financial needs and other external factors, causing the magazine to change its format, price, directorship, advertising policies, and focus. Morgan describes the fate of the magazine under its new director, Emile de Chapeaux, in 1836:

> Chapeaux shushed Richomme's "women's word" into polite drawing room conversation. His soft touch expunged the most compelling features of Richomme's *JDF* and erected hard boundaries between public and private spheres, between politics on the one hand, and fashion, literature, and consumer society on the other. Shored up, the new walls tightened the bonds between fashion and letters by enclosing them under the sign of a tamed femininity where women were to speak only in hushed tones. (224-225)

Claiming that the demise of the *Journal des femmes* was "more than either a simple failure in publication terms or capitulation to predatory fashion concerns" (225), Morgan asserts that, because of the magazine's driving agenda to promote women's writing, the publication was simply too feminist to be fashionable. The *Journal des femmes*, like others throughout the nineteenth century, ultimately had to steer clear of explicit links to

feminist objectives; however, the renunciation of feminist ideology does not necessitate a disengagement from the work of gender ideology. Women's magazines of an apparently apolitical nature were equally immersed in the ever-changing conceptualization of gender during the period, particularly through their discourses on women's domestic duties, fashion, and accessories.

In Pursuit of Distinction: Forging Gender and Class Through Fashion

Articles of clothing and fashion accessories hold prominent positions in women's periodicals of the époque, and more specifically, in the gendered discourses of such publications. These *things*, so often dismissed as frivolous symptoms of the nineteenth century's culture of consumption, or simply, as superfluous details or background within Realist and Naturalist texts of the period, actually prove to be, as Hiner points out, "polyvalent cultural marker[s]" (2). Such items feature significantly in fashion plates and other illustrations as well as in fiction and fashion write-ups within nineteenth-century women's periodicals. The nineteenth-century fashion column ("La Mode" in *La Mode illustrée* and "The Fashions" in *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*) epitomizes the intersection of the ideological work of the women's magazine and of the fashion of the era. The treatment of these objects in the nineteenth-century women's periodical press sheds light on the ways in which fashion and accessories functioned as critical locations for the evolution of perceptions of gender and social class in Britain and France. In *Accessories to Modernity*, Hiner analyzes

> the complex ways in which women's fashion accessories became primary sites for the ideological work of modernity: the interplay of imperialist expansion and domestic rituals, the quest for authenticity in the face of increasing social mobility, gendering practices and their interrelation with social hierarchies, and the rise of commodity culture and woman's paradoxical, and fragile, status as both agent and object within it. (2)

While I do not purport to treat the subject of clothing and accessories vis-à-vis the nineteenth-century imperialist project here, I do apply Hiner's comprehensive analysis of the precious objects found in the *corbeille de mariage* as crucial players in the work of gender and class ideology to my study. Hiner frames her project around items found in the *corbeille de mariage*, or wedding basket—cashmere shawls, *ombrelles*, fans, and handbags—and situates these accessories in relationship to "key attributes in the conceptualization of idealized femininity in nineteenth-century France—virtue, delicacy, authenticity, and domesticity—and to the processes of modernity from which bourgeois and elite women were ostensibly excluded" (4), such as industrialization. These objects were vital tools in the pursuit of distinction during the nineteenth century when it was becoming more difficult to set oneself apart thanks to the rapidly expanding consumer culture, increasing murkiness of social boundaries and hierarchies, and highly unstable political circumstances.[76]

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[76] For a more in-depth discussion of *la femme comme il faut* and the nineteenth-century pursuit of distinction, see also Susan Hiner's chapter, "*La Femme comme il (en) faut* and the Pursuit of Distinction" in *Accessories to Modernity*, as well as her article, "Lust for Luxe."

Pierre Bourdieu examines the role of taste and distinction in relation to social class and maintains that the power of classification is a key principle of the process of distinction: "Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed."[77] As I utilize the term, distinction is the process of distancing oneself from those in other social classes and thus classifying oneself via taste, and specifically in my work, taste in material culture, e.g., fashion. Such goods, their exchange, and their use are the critical implements of distinction. Bourdieu explains, "One only has to bear in mind that goods are converted into distinctive signs, which may be signs of distinction but also of vulgarity, as soon as they are perceived relationally, to see that the representation which individuals and groups inevitably project through their practices and properties is an integral part of social reality" (483). During the nineteenth century in Britain and France, goods like the clothing and fashion accessories in particular functioned as such "distinctive signs." According to Hiner, "It was through the fashion accessory in particular that distinction, so hotly pursued, would be forged, just as it was the accessory and its knockoffs that also disturbed the very boundaries the concept of distinction sought to maintain" (11).

Below, I look at such articles of clothing and knockoffs of accessories, alongside prescriptive discussions of the performance of authentic femininity, and examine the role they play in the forging, or *forgery*, of both gender roles and social class during the

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[77] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984) 6.

period. Hiner's use of the word "forged" is particularly pertinent to my discussion of the fake, for the verb "to forge" has an irrefutable double meaning: to construct or create *and* to copy or falsify. Such objects, then, as instruments of the pursuit of distinction, became tools for communicating and perhaps also for falsifying the social categories to which one belonged, specifically class and gender. Furthermore, they equally illuminated the constructedness of such categories during a period in which their stability seemed tremendously vital to maintaining social order.

Distinction turns out to be a particularly important process during socially and politically unstable times, specifically, during the mid- to late-nineteenth century. This crisis of authenticity stemmed from the radical, sweeping political, scientific, economic, social, and industrial transformations during the period, which disrupted the possibility of accurately interpreting appearances; such illegibility exacerbated individuals' needs to pursue distinction. Hiner explicitly focuses on July Monarchy through Second Empire France in her work and argues that during this period, "as more attention was falling on public spaces with the explosion of boulevards, cafés, department stores, and public gardens, and as industry made the reproduction and acquisition of commodities less expensive, there was even greater potential for class mixing and thus a more acute urgency for displaying one's distinction" (13). The violent revolutions, uprisings, invasions, and other political upheavals in France during the time, and the accompanying drastic social transformations were associated with a shift to an industrial economy as well as to a society-centered, rather than a court-centered, milieu (11-12).

On the other hand, life in Britain, while seemingly stable in comparison to that in France, particularly given the constancy of Victoria's reign, saw its own share of unrest during the period. For example, the multiple British bank and company failures, turbulent financial panics, and bank fraud during the Victorian Era greatly unsettled the economic and social stability of the period. The population growth was tremendous, and the vast, important developments in transportation, communication, and medicine changed the way citizens related to the world around them. While Britain did not witness the bloody revolutions and wars that France did during the mid- to late-nineteenth century, it did feel intensely the French catastrophes of the period. As I show below, British citizens were deeply invested in the turmoil France was experiencing, such as during the 1870-1871 Siege of Paris, perhaps in fear that such turmoil would spread to British soil. These events led British women, for example, the readers of *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, to think about their pursuit of distinction via fashion in relationship to French political regimes of the past. Against this unstable and tumultuous political and social background, French women as well paved new paths to distinction, paths that valued good taste, moderation, and economy. Fashion and the accessory thus become key players in the quest for distinction during the mid- to late-nineteenth century in Britain and France. Because this turbulent period created increasingly illegible and thus unmanageable feminine identities, women's domestic and fashion magazines attempted to stabilize and control said identities, particularly via their discussion of fashion, the accessory, and other potential tools for feminine fakery.

Fashion, *La Femme Comme il Faut*, and the Feminine Fake

The key to the relationship between the feminine fake and the pursuit of distinction for women via their objects in nineteenth-century Britain and France is particularly apparent in Balzac's 1840 essay, "La Femme comme il faut," discussed briefly above in the introduction to this chapter. *La femme comme il faut* and *la femme comme il* en *faut*, seemingly antithetical, turn out to be much more closely related than they first appear and ultimately are often indistinguishable, as Balzac illustrates by the end of his essay. Strikingly, the phrase "comme il faut" that marks the more proper of the two women is an intriguing signifier of the ideology of social propriety. With no true equivalent in English, "comme il faut" roughly translates to "as it should be" or "as is proper." What is most remarkable about this expression is that no real subject exists who determines what characteristics, ever variable, really do mark such propriety, or in this case, "authentic" femininity. *La femme comme il faut*, as Balzac describes her, possesses a certain *je ne sais quoi* that makes her charming and captivating but, at the same time, not so alluring as to make one doubt her superior breeding and discriminating taste. Describing her deliberate, yet sensual walk, Balzac declares, "Examinez cette façon d'avancer le pied en moulant la robe avec une si décente précision qu'elle excite chez le passant une admiration mêlée de désir, mais comprimée par un profond respect" (2) (Observe her way of moving her foot forward so that her dress clings to it with such proper precision that she excites admiration mixed with desire, but suppressed by a profound respect, in the passerby). Her crowning characteristics are, according to Balzac,

le bon goût (good taste) and a sense of moderation that governs every aspect of her dress and her life.

For example, she wraps herself in her cashmere shawl most precisely, neither hiding nor exposing too much of her perfectly shaped figure. She alone possesses the secret to this game of both veiling and revealing: "L'inconnue a une manière à elle de s'envelopper dans un châle ou dans une mante; elle sait se prendre de la chute de ses reins au col, en dessinant une sorte de carapace qui changerait une bourgeoise en tortue, mais sous laquelle elle vous indique les plus belles formes, tout en les voilant" (1) (This unknown woman has her own particular manner of wrapping herself in her shawl or mantel; she knows how to cover herself from the small of her back to her neckline, designing a sort of shell that would change a bourgeoise into a tortoise, but underneath which she reveals the most beautiful curves, while simultaneously veiling them). Her taste in and manner of dress in particular distinguish her from her less sophisticated, though, equally imitative, foil.

La femme comme il en faut is a novice of the sartorial system of which *la femme comme il faut* has mastered every nuance. Here, we can see the undeniable significance of fashion, and, perhaps more important, the value of correct usage of a particular accessory. Balzac insists, "La distinction particulière aux femmes bien élevées se trahit surtout par la manière dont elle tient la châle ou la mante croisée sur sa poitrine" (2) (The marked distinction of well-bred women is betrayed above all in the manner in which she holds her shawl or mantel crossed over her chest). He goes on to liken this *femme comme il faut* to one of Raphael's Madonnas and intricately details the perfection and precision

of her dress and comportment. *La femme comme il en faut*, lacking the vocabulary necessary to navigate the époque's complex social code, dresses carelessly, leaving her shawl (usually a cheap French imitation, rather than an expensively procured Kashmiri original) gaping to expose too much of her ill-fitting, poorly chosen, over-the-top ensemble.

Taste in fashion, then, is the key to asserting one's position within a particular social category during the nineteenth century; in other words, good taste is a, or rather *the*, crucial instrument of distinction. Hiner, in fact, establishes the synonymity of taste and distinction and points out that Bourdieu and Balzac similarly define these terms.[78] Balzac refers to *la femme comme il faut*'s exquisite taste throughout his essay: "Pour être femme comme il faut, il n'est pas nécessaire d'avoir de l'esprit, mais il est impossible de l'être sans beaucoup de goût" (4) (To be a *femme comme il faut*, it is not necessary to be witty, but it impossible to be one without good taste). However, he treats this trait with a bit of cynicism and seems to suggest that such taste, like distinction, is a social construction. After all, Balzac claims that *la femme comme il faut* is but "une création moderne" (6) (a modern creation) and an artifact of the changes brought on by the Revolution and the Napoleonic Empire. If this type of woman is merely a product of her political and social times rather than a member of the old nobility, then she has to have *developed* the trait of good taste the mourned *grande dame* is said to hold inherently. Interestingly, the focus on good taste in women's magazines such as *La Mode illustrée* during the mid-nineteenth century is so overwhelming that it becomes quite clear that

78 Susan Hiner, "Lust for Luxe: 'Cashmere Fever' in Nineteenth-Century France" *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 5.1 (2005) 80 Web, 8 Dec 2008.

good taste, during the period, was conceptualized as something that women could acquire and cultivate in order to mold and perform their own versions of authentic femininity.

The idea that taste can be learned and developed is at odds with the notion, on the other hand, that taste is inborn. Many of the writers of the periodicals I examine seemingly espouse the latter view while simultaneously and contradictorily revealing that taste can, after all, be acquired. For example, the February 11, 1866 issue of *La Mode illustrée* published a column, "Le Secret des Parisiennes," in which Emmeline Raymond describes the tact and good taste—usually inherent—that all well-bred Parisian women possess. Balzac's earlier emphasis on impeccable personal comportment, an elusive charm, a flawless sense of fashion, and of course, good taste, reverberates throughout Raymond's article. She writes,

> Les Parisiennes possèdent presque toutes un don inné, ou acquis, à peu près indéfinissable, et qui s'appelle le tact. C'est la mesure exacte qui nous enseigne à ne franchir aucune limite confinant à l'indiscrétion, qui nous apprend à éviter avec certaines personnes certains sujets de conversation….C'est là un grand art qui exige une extrême délicatesse de cœur."[79]
>
> [Parisian ladies almost all possess a rather indefinable, innate or acquired gift called tact. It is the precaution that teaches us not to cross any boundary bordering on an indiscretion and to avoid certain topics of conversation with certain people….This is a great art that requires an extreme delicacy of the heart.]

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79 Emmeline Raymond "Le Secret des Parisiennes" *La Mode illustrée* 7.6 (1866) 53.

Though her column is almost strictly descriptive, it should also be read as prescriptive, or rather, as a how-to guide to cultivating good taste and to thus becoming the ideal, well-bred lady for upwardly aspiring Parisians and other readers from throughout France and in Britain.[80] We likewise witness, in articles such as this, the impulse typical of the period to rein in unmanageable or unruly feminine identities via prescriptive discussions of proper, supposedly legible, femininities.

Texts such as this article that give advice on how to have or appear to have good taste reveal that taste, during the mid- to late-nineteenth century, is considered an attribute that can be learned, attained, and faked.[81] The construction of taste during the nineteenth century, particularly for readers of women's magazines, and as Balzac illustrates in "La Femme comme il faut," is closely linked to the construction of authentic femininity, social class, and even Frenchness or Englishness. In his essay, Balzac offers a social commentary on the creation of a new sort of taste independent of class and a critique of the nineteenth-century dissolution of class hierarchies as they intersect with gender.

Balzac's *femme comme il en faut* is a mere imitator of *la femme comme il faut*, for she tries desperately to reproduce the latter's taste, style, and comportment but fails miserably. Highlighting the tension between the natural and the fake within *la femme comme il faut*, Balzac contends, "L'adorable trompeuse use des petits artifices politiques

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80 *La Mode illustrée* was widely read; the cover of each issue lists a variety of prices for readers from Paris as well as from the *départements* and *Angleterre*.

81 See also Hume's "Of the Standard of Taste" (1757) for a discussion of taste as perfectable via education, experience, and practice. Hume argues that a standard of taste can indeed be achieved.

de la femme avec un naturel qui exclut toute idée d'art et de préméditation" (3) (The charming trickster exploits the calculating little artifices of a lady so naturally as to completely rule out any suggestion of art or premeditation). Her manners and mannerisms are so impeccable that an onlooker might guess she spends hours each day contemplating and perfecting them on her own, and yet, she does not betray an ounce of the artificiality of her comportment. Balzac explains the vast differences in *la femme comme il faut*'s self-presentation during the day and at night, as well as in public or at home, and illustrates an example of her performativity via a possible encounter one might have with her at a party: "Si votre rencontre a lieu dans un bal ou dans une soirée, vous recueillerez le miel affecté ou naturel de sa voix rusée; vous serez ravi de sa parole vide, mais à laquelle elle saura communiquer la valeur de la pensée par un manège inimitable. L'esprit de cette femme est le triomphe d'un art tout plastique" (4) (If your encounter takes place at a ball or party, you will gather the affected or natural honey of her cunning voice; you will be delighted by her empty words with which she will be able to communicate the value of her mind by an inimitable little trick. The mind of this lady is the triumph of an entirely synthetic art). *La femme comme il faut* indeed boasts an incredible mastery of the theatrical arts, and, of course, is also a very poor imitation of *la grande dame* of years past.

Balzac seems to lament the collapse of the *ancien régime* during which the aristocracy reigned supreme. Political and social transformations have facilitated the rise and reign of *la femme comme il faut*, who is a "création moderne, un déplorable triomphe du système électif appliqué au beau sexe" (6) (modern creation, a deplorable triumph of

the electoral system over the fair sex). She is but a shadow of *la grande dame*, as Balzac describes her via the unfortunate downfall of her predecessor:

> Le glas de la haute société sonne, entendez-vous! Le premier coup est ce mot moderne de femme comme il faut! Cette femme, sortie des rangs de la noblesse, ou poussée de la Bourgeoisie, venue de tout terrain, même de la province, est l'expression du temps actuel, une dernière image du bon goût, de l'esprit, de la grâce, de la distinction réunies, mais amoindries. (8)
>
> [The death knell of high society is ringing, listen carefully! The first stroke is this modern expression, *la femme comme il faut*! This lady, evicted from the ranks of the noblesse, or expelled from the bourgeoisie, from any territory, even the provinces, is the expression of our contemporary era, a last glimpse at a good taste, wit, grace, and distinction reunited, but diminished.]

While infamous *femmes comme il en faut* like Ida Gruget of Balzac's *Ferragus* or the coquettish Afy Hallijohn from Mrs. Henry Wood's *East Lynn*, with their excessive flounces and overstated sartorial accoutrements, fail to effectively impersonate *la femme comme il faut*, the latter likewise unsuccessfully mimics the extinct *grande dame*. These social roles, thus, seem to be a never-ending series of degraded copies of feminine identities. In his discussion of these two imitative archetypes, Balzac links the accessory, the fake, and the construction of gender during the nineteenth century with the collapse of the social system of the previous century. These two archetypes' engagement in fakery makes them a threat to the established social order, since not only are their social status and origin impossible to pinpoint, but also, because their identity production reveals the

possibility of the reimagining and reconstruction of gender and social class during the nineteenth century.

PERFORMING FEMININITY IN *LA MODE ILLUSTRÉE* AND *THE ENGLISHWOMAN'S DOMESTIC MAGAZINE*

French and British femininity are constructed dialogically within the periodicals of my study. Interestingly, the writers of *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* feel very powerfully the plight of their admittedly more fashionable French sisters before and during the Siege of Paris and consistently link changing fashion trends in England with current and past political revolutions in France. The writers of *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* frequently look to the French as role models in fashion; furthermore, even the periodical's readers point to the sartorial supremacy of their Continental counterparts. For example, in the January 1871 "Conversazione," the reader writing in highlights the French superiority of taste in fashion and style and laments the English lack thereof:

> A woman may be ever so clever and amiable, ever so attractive and accomplished, but if she has an ill-fitting or dowdy dress […], she will fail to inspire admiration in any man of refinement and good taste. Although Englishwomen have much improved of late years in good taste in dress, there are many points in which Frenchwomen greatly excel us. One of their favorite proverbs, and one which many Englishwomen would do well to study, is. 'Bien gantée et bien chausée on va partout!' (61)

English femininity in *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* is thus often constructed with the model of French femininity in mind. Throughout these periodical publications, we see that the English magazine writers are as invested in the symbol of the fallen *grande dame*, and by extension, in the rhetoric of *la femme comme il faut* and *la femme comme il en faut*, as are the French fashion writers, and perhaps even Balzac himself.

Dans Une Cage de Cristal: Hiding the Mechanism of the Fake in *La Mode illustrée*

The 1866 article from *La Mode illustrée* mentioned above, "Le Secret des Parisiennes," illustrates the myriad contradictions between performing femininity and necessarily disguising the very mechanisms of the performance, in order to appear to "act naturally." Raymond reveals that femininity and good taste may be performed, but women should not let these performances be visible. At the beginning of her treatise on Parisian taste and tact, Raymond muses,

> Le bon goût ne préside pas toujours aux diverses créations de l'industrie. On voit parfois des lampes ou des pendules dont les rouages sont enfermés dans une cage de cristal, et dont les moteurs fonctionnent sans vergogne au grand jour. A quoi bon laisser voir ce mécanisme? Ne vaut-il pas mieux jouir de l'effet sans toucher du doigt la cause, c'est-à-dire les engrenages, les poids et les ressorts? Telle est la question que les Parisiennes se sont posée, et qu'elles s'appliquent sans cesse à résoudre, selon les prescriptions du bon goût. (52-53)

> [Good taste does not always preside over industry's various creations. We sometimes see lamps or pendulums with the clockwork closed inside crystal cages, and with motors that function shamelessly in broad daylight. What good is it to let the mechanism be seen? Wouldn't it be better to enjoy the effect without experiencing firsthand the cause, that is, the gears, the weights, and the springs? This is the question that Parisian ladies have been wondering, and they apply themselves constantly to resolving it, according to the prescriptions of good taste.]

Raymond uses a household object, either a lamp or a clock, as a metaphor for women's domestic work. A Parisian woman should work hard while her husband is away and no one is around to observe her toils. All of her chores must be completed, and properly so, before her husband returns or visitors arrive; likewise, she must mask the effort she has put into her tasks. Raymond describes this skillful work of dissimulation by adroit *Parisiennes*: "[O]n ne connaît leurs talents et leur habileté que par les résultats; nul ne les voit à l'œuvre….[La Parisienne] distribuera l'emploi de ses heures de telle sorte qu'on ne pourra la voir qu'aux heures où elle sera *femme*, c'est-à-dire élégante…; jamais on ne l'apercevra vaquant à des travaux grossiers, lesquels exigent une toilette sordide" (53) (You only know their talents and skillfulness by their results; no one sees them at work…. [The Parisian lady] will distribute the use of her time so that you will not be able to see her except when she is *a lady*, that is, when she is elegant…; You will never notice her attending to crude work which demands an untidy attire). Furthermore, when her husband does finally return, the *Parisienne* must be out of her work clothes and well-dressed and also have the house in order, but she must leave no trace of the labor she has

just undertaken. Her sartorial selections, of course, play an important role in the Parisian lady's domestic theatricals. She should have arranged their home to the best of taste and be then occupied, in the presence of her spouse, only by tasks fitting of a lady, such as decorative needlework: "Quand son mari, las du labeur de la journée, regagne le foyer domestique, il ne trouve pas sa femme retranchée derrière une forteresse de nippes à raccommoder. Il se repose dans un logis rangé avec goût et propreté, en face d'une femme occupée à quelque travail gracieux" (53) (When her husband, weary after a day's work, returns to his household, he does not find his wife entrenched behind a fortress of old clothes to be mended. He rests in a home arranged with taste and neatness, facing a wife working at some graceful occupation).

The writer, clearly, here promotes a specific type of falseness compatible with and essential to authentic French, or more specifically, Parisian, femininity. A Parisian lady, for her own sake and that of her family and household, must not neglect her chores, and yet, paradoxically, she must never be seen at work at these tasks. Her household duties must be performed as if by magic. Continuing the metaphor of the clock, Raymond explains, "La Parisienne ne met pas les rouages du ménage au grand jour, elle se préserve soigneusement de les exposer dans une cage de cristal, et s'applique à les dissimuler avec le soin qu'on prend, sous d'autres latitudes, pour les signaler à l'attention générale" (53) (The Parisian lady does not show off the clockwork of her domestic duties in broad daylight, she protects herself from exposing it in a crystal cage and applies herself to dissimulating it with the care that ladies take, in other countries, in revealing it to public attention). Superior to women of other nations who wallow in the toils of their

housework and take pride in revealing the effort they have put forth, the *Parisienne* constructs an ideal, authentic femininity for herself via an apparent non-performance; in other words, engaging in feminine fakery sanctioned and legitimized by *La Mode illustrée,* she both reveals and then subsequently hides the signs of her identity production.

"Le Secret des Parisiennes," however, is replete with even further contradictions. Later in this same article, Raymond rails against the falseness, insincerity, and theatricality with which the Parisian lady sometimes acts because she is, by nature, *coquette*. All *Parisiennes*, in fact, according to the article, are burdened with this particular flaw. Raymond insists that this fault can either be detrimental, or rather, beneficial, to the Parisian woman. When she is flirtatious for entirely selfish motives, for example, to appear more interesting to others, to affect artistic aspirations, or to pretend to be something she otherwise is not, she appears ridiculous and is guilty of falsehood. On the other hand, coquettishness can be used for good: "Quand la coquetterie a pour mobile le désire de plaire à tout le monde, de se rendre agréable à la famille, aux vieilles femmes, aux vieillards, même aux parents pauvres, je ne saurais la condamner, quoiqu'elle émane d'un sentiment un peu personnelle" (53) (When coquetry is motivated by the desire to please everyone, to render oneself pleasant to one's family, to old ladies, to old men, even to poor relatives, I can't condemn it, even if it does come from a feeling that is a bit personal). Though coquetry appears to be the downfall of every Parisian lady, it becomes, in fact, almost a merit when implemented in good taste and in a manner authorized by the experts at *La Mode illustrée*. As Raymond illustrates in "Le Secret des

Parisiennes," this virtue-cum-vice is exemplary of the paradox of performing authentic femininity.

Train Wrecks: *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* and the Pursuit of Distinction

The writers of *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* treat this very paradox via a discussion of articles of clothing that serve as tools for distinction, such as dresses with trains and cashmere shawls. Astute admirers of the world of French fashion, they grapple with fashion's potential to separate the rich from the poor and the genuine aristocrat from both the commoner and the bourgeois while insisting upon moderation as a value all well-bred women should embrace. Their affection for dresses with trains, worn gracefully by *la grande dame* as a sign of distinction, is apparent in the late winter and early spring issues of the periodical in 1869. The writer's descriptions of the manner in which upper-class ladies of leisure sport these incommodious articles of clothing with great ease and style bring to mind Balzac's account of the cashmere shawl as a distinguishing accessory of *la femme comme il faut*. In the February 1869 number, the writer of the column "The Fashions" explains precisely when and how the dress with a train should be worn: it is meant almost exclusively for drawing-room gatherings and should never be worn to events in which one is expected to partake in dancing. As the writer elucidates in his or her brief history of this unique element of dress, trains have been *en vogue* since Imperial Rome in all European courts, and even then, "It required particular skill to wear them. This skill was the sign of distinction between the lady of

birth and the mere *bourgeoise*."[82] In the late 1860s, as the train was returning to fashion, such dresses retained their role as sartorial signifiers that divided the truly well-bred from the ill-bred:

> Trains require in those who wear them an appearance and manners of corresponding grace and dignity. To look well with sweeping skirts, a lady should possess not only a noble and graceful figure, but a distinguished *tournure* and elegant movements. Is it not evident, then, that most ladies of our age should not pretend to shine in all the majestic grandeur of a train? The artistic education and *bourgeoise* way of living to which they are brought up are little fitted to accustom them to the supreme elegance required for such a style of dress. (90)

Such a train, the writer explains with great attention to detail, must sweep across the ground in a precise manner as the wearer takes care not to let it catch under her feet while walking, and she must be able to skillfully brush it aside with one quick, subtle movement when she turns her body.

Equally, in these dresses with trains, or in more modern and convenient garb incorporating the train into a short dress with a longer skirt over it down the back, a woman must know what to do with the train when it cannot drag over the ground. She has two options now when wearing new, hybrid style of dress. First, she may loop the skirt up and under itself, attaching it at the waist of her dress, so that it creates lovely draping folds down the back of the shorter underskirt. Her second option is simply to drape the train over her arm and carry it, "thus call[ing] forth movements which cannot

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82 "The Fashions" *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* 7.50 (1869) 90.

fail to charm in a graceful woman" (90). Whether the train sweeps the floor enticingly or is tossed over the arm tastefully, it is, like *la femme comme il faut*'s cashmere shawl, a visible marker of good breeding. Linking the train to the period of the *grande dame*'s reign, the author describes, "The train thus becomes for a lady what the opera-hat was for a gentleman—a criterion of elegance and distinction. A *gentilhomme* used to be recognized at once under the *ancien régime* merely by the way in which he carried his hat under his arm" (90). This complex article of feminine clothing requires a great deal of "inherent" savoir-faire that comes as a result of the good breeding of the long-extinct *grande dame*.

The writer of "The Fashions" in the March number of the same year expresses enormous disappointment in the February forecast for the fashionability of the train and his or her recommended manner of wearing it gracefully: "We are bound to confess, the fashion of carrying the train upon the arm has not become as general as we imagined it would. Ladies…have allowed their long trains to sweep upon the floor, in sublime disregard of the tearing and soiling of exquisite lace and elaborate trimmings."[83] In April, the discussion of the train and the suggested way of wearing it continues; however, as the writer begins to link this and other female accoutrements with past and present French political regimes, it becomes clear that the writer realizes the train in its newest manifestation is bound to find its grave soon alongside that of the *grande dame*. It is culturally and politically impossible for the train to thrive, for it would create too immense of a rift between the fashion of the bourgeoisie and that of the aristocracy, a

83 "The Fashions" *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*. 7.51 (1869) 145-146.

division that was allegedly destroyed by the French Revolution. The writer argues that the dress with a train harkens back to the *ancien régime*, the fashions of which the English are copying desperately at the moment for lack of better current inspiration from their usual sartorial role models, the French.[84] The fashion correspondent declares,

> [I]f we copy the eccentricities of another age, it is evident we shall create a great difference between the fashions of the rich and those of the middle classes. The great principles of equality which came in with the great French Revolution extended to fashions as well as to greater things, and since then there has not been a marked difference between the shape and fashion of the dress of the *grande dame* and that of the *bourgeoise*; they differed little except in the richness and quality of the materials. (203)

The magazine column acknowledges the simultaneous destruction and necessary renewal of the signs and system of distinction, particularly vis-à-vis social class and femininity,

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84 In several 1869-1871 issues of *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, the writers lament the lack of fashion inspiration coming from France. At first, columnists declare that the fashions across the English Channel have become eccentric, perhaps due to the influence of foreigners such Americans and Russians present in Paris. These visitors' "love of display is very much greater than their taste" (February 1869, 146). Later, the writers decry the French fashions at Baden-Baden during the season of travel; they blame professional *couturiers* that Frenchwomen consult for the eccentricity of French dress. Claiming that "a lady must bring her own taste to bear upon the choice of every part of her toilet" (October 1869, 202), the fashion correspondent expresses his or her disappointment that French fashions have been so corrupted by such lack of taste. Finally, in March 1871, the writer ultimately blames the Prussian invaders for the unfortunate Frenchwomen's fashion downfall. Crying out in defense of the victims of both national and aesthetic invasion, he or she declares, "Prussian ladies, in their hatred of the French, have decided to throw off Paris as the arbiter of fashion. Well, they are welcome to dress as they please, and knowing what we do of German taste, we may add, as badly as they choose, but very soon Paris will re-assert herself as queen of *la mode*. She means…to throw off foreign influence, and to display her own native elegance and taste" (162).

during the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Like the broken fan, the train cannot maintain its status as a sign of distinction in late-1860s England. The article closes: "Do what we will, however, we shall not come back completely to the modes of a century ago, and all our imitations make at best but a pale copy of the brilliant court of the Bourbons. It would be best to remain what we are, for by imitation we lose all originality" (203). Despite these wise words, such rhetoric of imitation is consistent throughout these issues of *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*.

The Decline of the *Grande Dame* and her Shawl: Reading British and French Femininity with Balzac

A political undercurrent runs through the fashion columns of *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* in 1869 as the writers begin to comprehend that revolution is in the air in France. They seem to connect the changing political circumstances in France with the lack of fashion inspiration emanating from the nation at the time. Equally, these political overtones and the repeated rumination on France's frequently changing governments within "The Fashions" illustrate how clearly the construction of authentic British femininity hinges on the political and social environment in France. The "Paris" column (a regular feature of the magazine, which later even chronicles the Siege of Paris for British readers from France's capital city) of the October 1869 issue resounds explicitly with aversion for Napoleon III and signals the impending disaster in France: "We felt as if we were nearing a precipice, or walking upon a volcano which might at any moment blaze up and work our destruction.…[W]e cannot but tremble at the prospect of

any change, however dissatisfied we may be with our present government. The *red spectre* of a revolution haunts the minds of all those peaceable inhabitants."[85] Interestingly, *La Mode illustrée*, on the other hand, shows little or no indication of French political turmoil until the disappearance of its regular column, "La Mode" in the September 11, 1870 number, and then finally, the publication of the article, "Le Blocus de la Mode illustrée," which I discuss below, in the October 2 issue of that year. With this salient awareness of the imminent chaos overseas in the fashion capital, the writers of *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* cling to past political eras in France and their accompanying fashion trends as they advise the publication's readers of how to be good wives, mothers, and housekeepers, as well as stylish and respectable members of society.

"The Fashions" of May 1869 outlines the myriad changes in French and British style that have accompanied the tremendous political transformations in France since the mid-seventeenth century and exhibits a surprisingly Balzacian tone and attitude toward these dynastic and sartorial revolutions. The writer adeptly and satirically traces two hundred years of French political regimes and the various fashions that appropriately evolved alongside the French government. To begin, the columnist writes, "Looking back at the fashions of the last two centuries, it is curious to see what an index to the manners of the period the style of dress easily becomes to a thoughtful mind. Consider the fashions and the manners of the time of Louis XIV. Did not the dignified curly

85 "Paris" *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* 7.53 (1869) 208.

perruque suit the pomposity of the age?"[86] Continuing through the succession of French regimes, the writer expounds,

> See the reign of Louis XV, during which the ancient monarchy of the Bourbons was slowly crumbly down to ruin; see the last *debris* of the *ancien régime* trying with powder and patches, with creamy-white and red *fard*, to hides its wrinkles and pallor, to keep up its illusions, to think itself still full of youth and beauty, while it is decayed and hideous with its sins far more than with its age […]. But now comes the Revolution! All is changed in dress as well as in manners. Simplicity has succeeded to the elaborate fashions [of the *ancien régime*…]. Not for long, however…. (257)

The witty fashion correspondent continues this analogy of fashion and manners to the various political regimes, through the *Directoire* and then the First Empire. Declaring an époque's material culture its "fashion historian" (257), the writer launches into an analysis of their contemporary era's fashion and accessories seemingly straight out of one of Balzac's works, with apparent references to his novels and perhaps even to "La Femme comme il faut."

The columnist's lamentation and degradation of contemporary fashion trends, linked closely to the politic atmosphere in France at the time, is also clearly a critique of the crumbling class structures of the period. Beginning his or her disparagement of mid- to late-nineteenth-century trends in clothing and accessories, he declares,

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86 "The Fashions" *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* 7.53 (1869) 257.

> But even since then [the First Empire] how many changes!—and could we even fancy the *grandes dames* so well described by Balzac wearing the same fashions as the *grandes dames* of the present day portrayed by Arsène Houssaye in his last novel? For our part we could never picture to ourselves Madame de Beauséant trotting about town with a short dress, the apology of a bonnet poised on the top her head, with a quantity of hair falling loose upon her back, and wearing the dress of *tout le monde* bought ready-made at the fashionable *magasin de nouveauté*. (257-258)

Targeting styles perpetually criticized by *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*—short dresses, absurd hats, and ostentatious coiffures composed of false hair—the writer invokes a commentary on bourgeois fashion, that of "*tout le monde*." The author returns to a discussion of the beloved cashmere shawl, yearning to resuscitate it as a symbol of wealth, noble birth, and authentic femininity. Echoing, indeed almost quoting, Balzac, he or she states, "The triumph of the *grande dame* of former days was the shawl. She revealed her identity by the way she drape[d] the rich soft folds of a *cachemire* […]. Her cashmere shawl caused her to be recognized, just as […] the goddesses descended from Mount Olympus were distinguished from mere mortals simply by the way in which their feet […] touched the ground" (258). Unfortunately, this sartorial classic had been replaced by more unconventional and pretentious styles and was at odds with the stylistic choices of the masses. Not only was the shawl, by then, incompatible with the newest

skirt shape of the period—the immense protuberance of the bustle[87]—but also, changes in demand, economic circumstances, and the political climate in Britain, France, and Kashmir caused the demise of the shawl by the early 1870s.

In this column, the fashion correspondent highlights one of the major sources of feminine illegibility during the period: rather than looking to those of higher social standing for fashion inspiration, women now seek to imitate the styles of *la femme comme il en faut*. This game of imitation, rendered more complex by the accessibility of fashion thanks to industrialization and the rise of ready-to-wear, complicates the extant social strata. Without distinguishing signs like fans, cashmere shawls, and trains on dresses, how could one differentiate the aristocrat from the bourgeoise, or the bourgeoise from the demi-mondaine? Furthermore, when the upper classes emulate the clothing choices of the lower classes and the upwardly aspiring, their legibility as upper class is compromised. The article continues with further bemoaning of fashion's fate:

> Alas! *nous avons changé tout cela*. Those who ought to set up the example of a simple, tasteful style of dress seem bent upon copying the *modes* of a class of women with whom they would scorn to associate. Now that the scepter of fashion is wielded by impure hands, we need not wonder at the strange eccentricities imposed upon us; simplicity and good taste are fast going from us, and the cashmere shawl with its long wrapping folds—so graceful, so distinguished, so modest—could not agree with the modern style of dress. (258)

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87 Meg Andrews, "Kashmir and Shawls of Paisley Design" *Antique Costumes and Textiles* par. 22 Web, 1 June 2011.

The writer argues that the emergence of the new, extravagant, tasteless styles of those now brandishing the "scepter of fashion" has caused the dissolution of the signs of distinction that both maintained and were upheld by the conventional class structures of the *ancien régime*. *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine,* and this issue in particular, seems to struggle to accept the transformation of social hierarchies and the sartorial signifiers of this system. Indeed, as its writers grapple with this dissolution of hierarchies and systems of decades past, they continue to attempt to rein in the disorderly feminine identities that challenge these systems, via their recommendations about fashion, accessories, and other tools for feminine fakery.

Immediately following "The Fashions" of May 1869 is the regular column, "Spinnings in Town," written by an author known as "The Silkworm." In this article, the Silkworm sings the praises of the cashmere shawl, and above all, authentic Indian cashmeres. After repeatedly expressed grievances about the demise of the cashmere shawl throughout the magazine, particularly in the preceding fashion column, this short treatise appears to be a poor attempt at a resurrection of the shawl as a signifier of authentic femininity. The Silkworm struggles in this article to bolster the social and signifying status of the shawl as this accessory's reign is ending. Before the *cachemire* fell from power in France, it symbolized modesty, marriage, marriageability, and, of course, authentic upper-class femininity. We can see in this issue's "The Fashions" that the cashmere shawl in Britain upheld a similar system of values, but it lost its signifying power as it went out of fashion during the late 1860s and early 1870s.

The complete story of the origin of such shawls in Britain and on the Continent dates back nearly one thousand years if we trace the accessory to when it was first woven in Kashmir in the eleventh century (Andrews, par. 3). This tale of shifting empires, national conflict, and cross-cultivation of art and commerce between the East and the West, along with the intricate cultural history and the complex hierarchy of shawls of various sources and manufactures around the world, is beyond the scope of this project. Let it suffice to say here, however, that in the mid-nineteenth century, the shawl market in Britain and France became so saturated with industrially produced European knock-offs worn by lower-class women that the Indian shawls prized by *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* writers lost all value as signifiers of authentic femininity and social status.[88]

The Silkworm may have been aware of some of the history of this accessory and was apparently loath to dismiss the authentic Kashmiri shawl as a signifier of social distinction and proper femininity. After briefly mentioning the Paisley, Norwich, and French shawls in "Spinnings in Town," she extensively sings the praises of Indian shawls, including the Rampoor Chudah, Delhi, and Decca. The crowning jewel of all shawls is, without a doubt, the fourth type of Indian shawl: the Cashmere. She explains how these accessories are fabricated and exclaims, "The Cashmere shawls are *the* Indian shawls *par excellence*, and are, as they indeed deserve to be, the prize of every woman who possesses one, and the envy of those who have not obtained that 'dear delight'"

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88 For further discussion of cashmere shawls, see also Maskiell, "Consuming Kashmir: Shawls and Empires 1500-2000"; Lévi-Strauss, *The Cashmere Shawl*, and Hiner's chapter, "'Cashmere Fever': Virtue and the Domestication of the Exotic" in *Accessories to Modernity*.

(270). Stressing the importance and significance of *genuine* cashmere shawls, the Silkworm declares, "Mantles are nice, necessary, and this season particularly pretty, […] but fashions will change, modes will alter, and among all the 'things of beauty' one sees constantly, only *les vrais cachemires* are 'a joy for ever'" (271). However, the Silkworm would be disappointed to discover that *les vrais cachemires* were losing their sartorial signifying power and would bring joy to very few in the years to come.

While *la femme comme il en faut* could generally be recognized by her cheap knock-off shawl, and the *la femme comme il faut*'s identity is indicated by her luxurious Kashmiri original, this hierarchy among both shawls and women is not so clear-cut. As we see in Balzac's essay, the lines denoting social strata in the nineteenth-century have blurred, and *la femme comme il faut* and her imitative counterpart can no longer be visually distinguished from one another, nor can their beloved accessories. All of this confusion is thanks to the possibility of the industrial reproduction of fashion, especially knock-offs of beautiful Indian shawls; the sartorial imitation of the upper classes by the upwardly aspiring and vice-versa; and the degradation of the traditional social system in the nineteenth-century. The Silkworm and her colleagues may mourn the shawl as the official distinguishing accessory of the *grande dame*, but its demise is as inevitable as was the downfall of the *grande dame* herself. The collapse of any distinction between *la femme comme il faut* and *la femme comme il en faut* further complicates the deterioration of the once neatly ordered social world and its sartorial signifiers leftover from the *ancien régime*. Only in this world of political turmoil and crumbling class structures can performance and authenticity emerge as compatible terms.

Thus, the paradox of performing authentic femininity is exposed via these women's periodicals as they attempt to control and contain the emerging out-of-control feminine fakery—extravagance, poor taste, excessive spending—discussed here. The performance of femininity, of course, should be masked, and not exposed behind cages of crystal. Furthermore, articles of clothing and accessories like trains and cashmere shawls, when worn correctly and by the correct women, were *potentially* pathways to performing proper femininity and bourgeois or upper-class respectability; the prescriptive treatment of these accoutrements in women's magazines demonstrates that periodical readers and writers accepted the idea that authentic femininity was something that could be manipulated and molded.

"Le Blocus de la Mode illustrée": *Les Goûts Raisonnables* and the Siege of Paris

While both *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* and *La Mode illustrée* stress the values of good taste, moderation, and economy, particularly vis-à-vis feminine fashion, throughout years of their publication's issues, the numbers published by *La Mode illustrée* during the Siege of Paris illustrate the epitome of nineteenth-century sentiments about extravagance in dress and the construction of authentic femininity. The writers of *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* constantly decry lavishness in and overspending on dress; for example, the columnist for "The Fashions" of May 1869 declares tersely, "Enormous chignons, enormous sash-bows, enormous puffs at the back of the waist are by no means distinguishing styles of a well-bred lady's toilet. The

present style of dress is very graceful when not exaggerated" (258-259). Not only do overstatement and waste in fashion muddle the social hierarchies in place, but within *La Mode illustrée*, they are also condemned as unnecessary, distasteful, and inauthentic. In the January 9, 1870 "Les Modes" of *La Mode illustrée*, Raymond insists upon her magazine's mission, "On connaît les principes d'après lesquels *La Mode illustrée* se gouverne: étudier la mode, non pour la suivre avec frénésie, mais pour choisir parmi ses lois sans cesse renouvelées celles qui peuvent favoriser à la fois l'économie et l'élégance"[89] (We know the principles by which *La Mode illustrée* governs itself: to study fashion, not to follow it frantically, but in order to choose amongst its laws, constantly renewed, those which both favor economy and elegance). A lady could certainly never be *comme il faut* in gaudy attire on which she spent too much money. Such sentiments prove to be all the more true at the height of the atrocities of the Franco-Prussian War. Middle-class French attitudes linking good taste and authentic femininity with the values of good taste, moderation, and economy in dress fill the October through December 1870 issues of *La Mode illustrée*; this discourse illustrates that the nineteenth-century fixation on feminine authenticity is only heightened in times of turmoil and chaos. Furthermore, these issues of the periodical pointedly connect "les goûts raisonnables" (reasonable tastes) with femininity, Frenchness, and patriotism.

The article, "Le Blocus de la Mode illustrée," came out in the October 2, 1870 issue and is one of the first true signs of the war published in the periodical. Appearing within a much sparser number, issued in larger print, and lacking the usual meticulous

89 Emmeline Raymond "Les Modes" *La Mode illustrée* 11.2 (1870) 14.

detail in the fashion descriptions, the article explains the circumstances preventing the publishers from producing a magazine as rich and informative as it had previously been. Raymond chronicles the torments of their times and describes how communications have been cut off in France. Furthermore, she points out, most of the staff of *La Mode illustrée* has left: many have joined the army or national guard; others have fled Paris; and very few remain to run the printer.[90] Despite these interruptions and the impossibility of delivering every issue directly to the magazine's patrons each week, consumers are still eagerly seeking out and reading the periodical. Raymond declares,

> Et pourtant, en dépit des préoccupations, des tristesses, des douleurs générales, nos abonnées parisiennes viennent sans cesse réclamer leurs numéros…On leur répond en leur montrant les lits qui attendent les blessés dans la librairie…Mais leur demande est flatteuse pour nous; elle prouve le degré d'utilité de la *Mode illustrée*, et nous encourage à redoubler d'efforts le jour trois fois heureux où nous pourrons vaquer paisiblement à nos travaux. (315)
>
> [And yet, in spite of these preoccupations, sadness, and public sorrow, our Parisian subscribers come constantly to ask for their issues…We respond by showing them the beds that wait for the injured in the bookshop…But their request flatters us; it shows the usefulness of *La Mode illustrée* and encourages us to redouble our efforts the exceedingly happy day when we will be able to peacefully attend to our business.]

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90 Emmeline Raymond "Le Blocus de la Mode illustrée" *La Mode illustrée* 11.40 (1870) 315.

The magazine, however, continues publication throughout these months of turmoil and promises to send, once peace has been reached, the back-issues to readers who have been unable to seek out their copies of the magazine at the *La Mode illustrée* office.

Strikingly, Raymond notes that she has received three letters from subscribers demanding that she change the nature of the magazine out of respect for the dire circumstances in which the nation finds itself. Fashion and women's domestic duties, clearly, are subjects too frivolous to consider during wartime. However, she adamantly refuses to alter the focus of her periodical. Keenly aware and proud of the usefulness of her magazine for ladies throughout France, Europe, and in the US, she defends *La Mode illustrée*, its purpose, and her intent that the magazine uphold its mission to cater to fashionable women worldwide for the duration of the political unrest. She declares,

> Nous essayerons de dédommager nos abonnées en donnant à l'avenir un degré d'utilité toujours plus grand à la publication qu'elles ont adoptée. Pendant une longue époque de frivolité coupable, de luxe insensé, d'excitations vaniteuses et malsaines, la *Mode illustré* a toujours essayé de réagir contre le courant qui devait nous conduire et nous a conduits en effet à l'abîme. Elle n'aura rien à changer à l'esprit qui l'animait; seulement elle trouvera une force nouvelle dans l'avantage de marcher avec le courant nouveau que nous allons suivre: elle sera plus que jamais le journal du travail féminin et des goûts raisonnables. (317)
>
> [We will try to make up to our subscribers by lending, in the future, even greater utility to the publication that they have adopted. During a long period of shameful frivolity, foolish luxury, vain and unhealthy stimulation, *La Mode*

illustrée always tried to react against the current that should have driven us and did drive us, effectively, into the abyss. Nothing will change the spirit that animated the magazine; it will only find renewed force in the advantage of walking with the new current that we are going to follow: it will be, more than ever, the magazine of lady's work and reasonable tastes.]

"Reasonable tastes" here become code for correct, proper, and authentic femininity. And at what other time than during the middle of a bloody siege could the performance of authentic femininity be more apropos, or even, urgent? Throughout the following few months, the magazine chronicles the travails of Paris life during the blockade of the city, including the work women were necessarily performing to aid their nation, such as volunteering as nurses in makeshift hospitals or opening their homes to and caring for injured soldiers. Women, with their reasonable tastes, were called upon to nurse their nation's men, teach their children the principles of moderation and economy, and avoid waste themselves in order to ensure the survival of France during the war and pass on these French values.

Extravagance, the antithesis of reasonable taste, is as much the enemy of the French as Prussia, "la race bassement envieuse et sournoisement rancunière qui dévalise notre pays en ce moment"[91] (the envious and underhandedly spiteful race that is currently robbing our country). As Raymond mentions in the article, "Prophétie Concernant la Mode" in the October 23, 1870 issue, "S'il y avait eu moins de robes de velours et de satin, moins de fourrures et de garnitures, nous aurions eu plus de canons, et des armées

91 Emmeline Raymond "Propétie Concernant la Mode" *La Mode illustrée* 11.43 (1870) 340.

plus nombreuses, mieux approvisionnées. Pour le dire net, c'est le luxe qui a perdu la France" (340) (If there had been fewer dresses of velvet and satin, fewer furs and trimmings, we would have had more canons, and more numerous, better supplied armies. To say it more clearly, it is luxury that has been the perdition of France). Blindly following fashion's lavish whims, according to Raymond, has already cost the French nation great military and national expense. However, on the other hand, moderation, economy, and reason in everything would be befitting of a patriotic French female citizen.

The magazine, then, during this period, becomes a platform for promoting good, tempered tastes in all aspects of life, but of course, in fashion especially. The periodical, more than ever before, rails against unnecessarily expensive clothing, and practically aligns excess and exaggeration in dress with traitorousness. Articles perpetually decry the "toilettes coûteuses" (340) (costly toilettes) of the past and proclaim endlessly that good taste is the natural gift of the French. At the end of the year, Raymond calls on French women to extend their reasonable tastes in dress and sense of moderation to their lifestyles and to the bettering of their minds and personal values:

> Je ne demande pas aux femmes de s'occuper de politique,—je les adjure seulement de rompre avec toutes les traditions de frivolité et tous les goûts de dépense exagéré qui nous ont conduits là où nous sommes. Je les conjure de

> s'instruire, de répudier les idées fausses, de prendre l'habitude de raisonner et d'agir en vertu d'un principe qui seul est éternel, immuable: celui de la justice.[92]
>
> [I'm not asking ladies to get involved in politics,—I am imploring them only to break off with all of the traditions of frivolity and all their taste for the exaggerated expenses that have brought us to where we are now. I implore them to learn, to renounce false ideas, to get into the habit of reasoning and acting in the virtue of one principal that alone is eternal and immutable: that of justice.]

In light of current events, falseness is abhorred now above all vices, and truth, moderation, and justice are the pinnacles of proper French femininity. Though the previously ever-changing world of fashion ultimately comes to a standstill during the Franco-Prussian War, *La Mode illustrée*, short on its usual subject matter, extends the general principles that govern the magazine's policies on fashion to personal virtues and national matters. Linking taste in fashion to national well-being, *La Mode illustrée* condemns falseness and feminine artifice—or at least, *visible* artifice—and links simplicity of taste and dress with justice and, therefore, French nationalism.

CONCLUSION: THE TRIUMPH OF THE FAÇADE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY FEMININITY IN BRITAIN AND FRANCE

The article, "Variétés: La Façade" that appeared in the December 11, 1870 issue of *La Mode illustrée* exemplifies the increased concern about feminine artifice and

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92 Emmeline Raymond "Revue de Fin d'Année" *La Mode illustrée* 11.52 (1870) 414.

general deceptiveness that has arisen in both Britain and France during the Franco-Prussian War. "La Façade" begins with the words of an unnamed "diplomate contemporain, très-célèbre et très-hostile envers la France"[93] (a contemporary diplomat, very famous and very hostile toward France): "La France? Ce n'est qu'une façade!" (395) (France? It's nothing but a façade!). While Raymond at first points out the cruelty of the diplomat's words, she then acknowledges the truth therein: "[I]l faut l'avouer; si cette affirmation est inexacte en tant que vérité générale, elle est vraie dans un nombre de cas particuliers, tellement nombreux qu'ils ont grandement influé dans la préparation et l'accomplissement des désastres de la patrie" (395) (We must confess; if this affirmation is inexact as far as general truth, it is true in a number of particular cases, so numerous that they have greatly affected the preparation and accomplishment of the disasters of the country). The façade, evidently, has played a major role in the recent national catastrophe.

Raymond utilizes the symbol of a house in a very luxurious Parisian *quartier*, which appears opulent from the outside but is ill-lit, gloomy, and stuffy on the inside, to represent this sort of falseness which has afflicted the nation. The article laments the façades of education, religion, work, and material love, and even of music, poetry, and clothing. Why do some French women *feign* religious devotion, only to neglect their own households, and why do some French men (and presumably women as well) shirk their responsibilities at their jobs and, essentially, steal from their employers as they *pretend* to work throughout the day? Why do authors cleverly compose poetry that is, in

93 Emmeline Raymond "Variétés: La Façade" *La Mode illustrée* 11.50 (1870) 395.

reality, prose disguised as verse by carefully inserted line breaks? And why do women evade their domestic and maternal duties by first sending their daughters to nurses, then shipping them away to the *pension*, and finally, immediately marrying them off? Bemoaning these national façades, Raymond declares that they are the ruin of the nation, particularly during this time of crisis when solidarity, justice, and above all, truthfulness, are critical to the well-being of France.

The façade, much like extravagance as it is decried through the issues of *La Mode illustrée* and *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* that I have discussed, has led to the current national disaster in France, felt so keenly by the readers of the British magazine. The façade of extravagance, and these other façades which Raymond condemns, must be put to an end, or else France will never survive the atrocities of the Siege of Paris. The article concludes,

> Mais on ne saurait désormais absoudre ceux qui essayeraient de rester dans l'ornière, d'y attirer leurs camarades, ceux qui ont cru que l'apparence de toute chose pouvait tenir lieu de toute réalité, ceux qui n'ont pas compris qu'en diminuant leur valeur morale, ils amoindrissaient la patrie, ceux en un mot qui, en fait d'instruction, de travail, de religion, de devoir, se sont contentés—d'une façade. (397)
>
> [But we will never be able to absolve those who would try to stay in a rut, to drag their friends there, those who believed that the appearance of everything could take the place of reality, those who did not understand that by diminishing their

moral value, they also weaken their nation, those who, in a nutshell, in regard to education, work, religion, and duties, contented themselves—with a façade].

According to Raymond, many French citizens are guilty of accepting nothing more than façades in their day-to-day lives and of worshipping them; however, women seem to be most responsible for their nation's well-being via a rejection of the façade and the performance of authentic femininity. Periodical writers such as Raymond simultaneously attempted to break down feminine façades in order to contain feminine fakery while also authorizing women to take on particular acceptable façades. Paradoxically, it seems, the performance of authentic femininity equally entails embracing certain sanctioned façades. Women must perform their domestic duties while hiding the mechanism of their work; wear elegant clothes suitable for their social class; embrace good taste, moderation, and economy; and apparently eliminate all façades, especially of extravagance, from their lives. However, as I have demonstrated throughout my readings above, the very prescriptive nature of these magazine articles that delineate precisely *how* to perform authentic femininity reveals that, during the nineteenth century, individuals were beginning to think of femininity as something that could constructed.

As Beetham argues, though, these magazines neither dictated a monolithic gender ideology to their readers nor constructed one cohesive, authentic femininity which all readers sought to imitate. We need to continue to study how readers resisted or participated in the ideological positioning by these periodicals. While the readers of *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* and *La Mode illustrée* may have often been complicit in the ideological work of gender within these magazines, surely they equally

and simultaneously opposed the regulatory accounts of femininity that the publications posited. Throughout my study, I have tried to consider the elusive "real reader," though in many cases, it is unclear whether she existed at all. In fact, there is little evidence even that some issues of *La Mode illustrée* during the Siege of Paris were actually read. While Raymond insists that her subscribers sought out their issues at the publishing house, two of the late 1860s issues that I examined during my research had clearly never been read: their pages remained intact and uncut. It is clear, however, that during the Franco-Prussian War, while French publishers may have been unable to distribute magazines to their subscribers in Paris, Parisians were able to receive information from abroad via periodicals arriving from Britain.

The cross-pollination of ideas about femininity between Britain and France during the late 1860s and early 1870s, particularly during the Franco-Prussian War, is critical to understanding how gender was increasingly conceived as unstable during the mid- to late-nineteenth century. In Britain and France, poor taste, extravagance, and expense had the potential to further upset the nations' social systems. British panic about the spread of Revolutionary fever that had taken hold of France since the late-eighteenth century is expressed in these articles that link the changing French political systems with fashion and warn against fashion practices that could further destabilize the social class hierarchy. While in Britain, extravagant and expensive ensembles most directly threaten the legibility of gender and class identity, in France, such clothing actually also imperils the nation's military performance against Prussia and thus the future of France itself.

The tools of feminine fakery examined in this chapter, such as authentic and imitation cashmere shawls, trains on dresses, and sartorial extravagance, all supply a "sign" of femininity and other social categories that will immediately be forgotten as a sign. The shift in the economic strata of years past was accompanied by a new system of signs and signifiers of class and gender; these changes interrupted the legibility of appearances, particularly of women and their social categories. Fashion and accessories, along with performances of "authentic" femininity (e.g., the sort of clandestine industry recommended in "Le Secret des Parisiennes") render these women illegible or complicate the legibility of their social status, femininity, and national identity. Women's periodicals, such as *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* and *La Mode illustrée*, along with these articles of clothing and women's accessories and more specifically, the treatment thereof in these magazines, provide examples from popular culture of the mid- to late-nineteenth century of the impulse to contain feminine fakery through their sanctioning of performances of femininity. They are furthermore key to revealing the paradox of performing authentic femininity during the mid- to late-nineteenth century in Britain and France. As I demonstrate in Chapter III, the paradoxical performance of authentic femininity prescribed in the mid- to late-nineteenth-century French and British women's periodical press likewise plays out in two widely read, canonical novels of the time, *Vanity Fair* and *La Curée*.

Chapter III: Identity as Charade: Performing Gender, Class, and Nation in *Vanity Fair* and *La Curée*

> What more has the Manager of the Performance to say?…He is proud to think that his Puppets have given satisfaction to the very best company in the empire. The famous little Becky Puppet has been pronounced to be uncommonly flexible in the joints, and lively on the wire: the Amelia Doll, though it has had a smaller circle of admirers, has yet been carved and dressed with the greatest care by the artist: the Dobbin Figure, though apparently clumsy, yet dances in a very amusing and natural manner….
>
> And with this, and a profound bow to his patrons, the Manager retires, and the curtain rises.[94]

Thus begins *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray's epic tale of Becky Sharp, Amelia Sedley, and William Dobbin, published in 1847-1848 and set during the Napoleonic Era and the years following the defeat of the French emperor. These lines conclude Thackeray's preface to the novel, entitled "Before the Curtain," and set up the work's extended metaphor of the fair while solidifying its titular allusion to Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. More important, "Before the Curtain" establishes the theatricality of the novel as a whole, the performativity of its characters—especially, but not only, Becky— and the complex relationship between this acting and the characters' seemingly natural identities. That Thackeray insists upon his novel's theatricality and his characters' performances seems,

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94 William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair* (London: Penguin, 2003) 6.

at first glance, contradictory to the principles of Realist writing; however, his simultaneous engagement with literary Realism and the extended metaphor of the performance call to mind Lynn Voskuil's contention that, as I discuss further below, authenticity and theatricality, though apparently paradoxical, indeed proved compatible during the Victorian Period.

The reconciliation and unification of artifice with authenticity at Vanity Fair exemplify Voskuil's framework of "acting naturally" and function in *Vanity Fair* to shed light on the formation of various identities within the text, all while rendering them, surprisingly, less understandable. Vanity, or human attachment to the world and its myriad material and corporeal enticements, is both condemned and yet also celebrated in Thackeray's work. The novel's opening quoted above, and its closing lines, "Ah! *Vanitas Vanitatum!* Which of us is happy in this world? Which of us has his desire? or, having it, is satisfied? – Come children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out" (809), highlight that, in the pages in between, *Vanity Fair* is rife with artifice, shams, and performances.

Like *Vanity Fair*, Zola's *La Curée* is replete with contradictory notions of feminine authenticity and artifice. Published in 1871-1872, *La Curée* takes place during the 1850s and 1860s, the zenith of the Second Empire in France, Napoleon III's reign, and the emperor's monumental transformation of Paris via the phenomenon of Haussmannization. While the metaphor of the performance is not as explicit in *La Curée* as in *Vanity Fair*, Zola's insistence upon theatricality in this novel, the second of the Rougon-Macquart cycle, is nonetheless unequivocal. For example, the opening scene of

La Curée features Renée Saccard and her stepson, Maxime, seated in her carriage amidst dozens of other vehicles at a standstill as they exit the Bois de Boulogne. Zola meticulously and methodically describes the spaces his characters occupy and here aligns these environments quite plainly with backdrops or sets for a play within this passage, as he does throughout the work. Describing the park in which Renée and Maxime linger as they await an end to the evening traffic jam, Zola writes,

> [D]e l'autre côté de ce miroir clair [du lac], les deux îles, entre lesquelles le pont qui les joint faisait une barre grise, dressaient leurs falaises aimables, alignaient sur le ciel pâle les lignes théâtrales de leurs sapins, de leurs arbres aux feuillages persistants dont l'eau reflétait les verdures noires, pareilles à des franges de rideaux savamment drapées au bord de l'horizon. Ce coin de nature, ce décor qui semblait fraîchement peint, baignait dans un ombre légère, dans une vapeur bleuâtre qui achevait de donner aux lointains un charme exquis, un air d'adorable fausseté.[95]
>
> [From the far side of (the lake's) mirror surface rose two islands, joined by the gray hyphen of a bridge, above which loomed charming cliffs whose theatrical rows of firs and other evergreens stood out against the pale sky, while reflections of their dark foliage on the water's surface resembled the fringes of curtains artfully draped over the horizon. This little patch of nature, with its air of a

95 Emile Zola, *La Curée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981) 42-43.

freshly painted backdrop, lay immersed in a pale shadow, a bluish haze that added a finishing touch of exquisite charm, of delightful falsity, to the distances.][96]

Here, Zola uses language like "les lignes théâtrales de leurs sapins," "des franges de rideaux," and "ce décor qui semblait fraîchement peint," to set up Renée's surroundings as the stage upon which she plays, likewise situating her as a performer throughout the novel and Second Empire Paris, in all its modern glory, as her theatrical backdrop.

Not only do the characters' environments become stage sets in *La Curée*, but moreover, their wardrobes, especially Renée's extravagant ensembles from her dressmaker Worms, morph into costumes through the work of Zola's painstaking prose. The theatre itself plays a vital role in the novel, for the author situates two major, pivotal scenes that both function as textual *mises en abyme* during performances: Renée and Maxime's visit to witness La Ristori's portrayal of *Phèdre* and their participation in the elaborate *tableaux vivants* during the Mi-Carême party at the Saccards' *hôtel*. (I discuss the latter episode in greater detail below.) Zola's emphasis on Renée's performativity and the theatricality of the world in which she and the other characters live at first appears starkly contradictory to the Naturalist ideas guiding *Les Rougon-Macquart*; however, the repeated underscoring of artifice and fakes in the text ultimately reveals the writer's commitment to portraying the multi-faceted social universe of 1850s and 1860s France in the spirit of a disinterested experimenter. As I analyze *La Curée* together with *Vanity Fair* and their respective heroines, I consider how, in these Naturalist and Realist novels, Zola and Thackeray represent mid- to late-nineteenth-century life in France and

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96 Emile Zola, *The Kill*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: The Modern Library, 2004) 6.

Britain as a complete performance, or sham. The paradox of "acting naturally" in these novels illuminates the impossibility of ever rendering Becky, Renée, and their identities—gendered, classed, and national—legible within the rapidly transforming societies that Zola and Thackeray portray in their texts.

"ACTING NATURALLY" IN *VANITY FAIR* AND *LA CURÉE*

In *Vanity Fair* and *La Curée*, Becky Sharp and Renée Saccard enact performances of gender, class, and nation, but these performances are, contradictorily, fraught with authenticity. As discussed above, Voskuil contends that performance and authenticity were not conflicting concepts for the Victorians; here, I extend her argument to nineteenth-century France as well. Voskuil explains that natural acting and the reconciliation of the authentic with the theatrical became ways of helping the Victorians to comprehend the world around them. The method of natural acting erases the boundary between the actor's subjectivity as an individual and the character he or she is supposed to be playing. Describing Hazlitt's discussion of the concept in "Madame Pasta and Mademoiselle Mars," Voskuil elaborates,

> [Hazlitt] appears to detheatricalize the acting process with a concept of selfhood that is determined by being rather than acting…. Acting should not be recognizable as such, Hazlitt seems to suggest, but should instead produce a virtual reality so convincingly mimetic that audiences cannot distinguish between players and their parts, as if the person does not play the role but becomes it.

> Such acting would require no suspension of disbelief, because the actress's subjectivity is apparently effaced as part of the acting process. (29)

That is to say, by engaging in natural acting, nineteenth-century players would erase the very theatricality of their performances, integrating the roles they are intended to act into their personhood and vice-versa.

Similarly, when Becky and Renée "act naturally," they are both performing roles and simultaneously extracting some essence from the depths of their personhoods, integrating their allegedly performed and supposedly authentic identities to the point that one cannot tell the difference between the two. Furthermore, as they "act naturally" both in the theatre and within their everday lives, they simultaneously deny the performativity of such enactments. We thus witness the erasure of fakeness from the feminine fake and see that it is, after all, compatible with authenticity in nineteenth-century Britain and France. Voskuil argues that natural acting and "acting naturally" had the potential to reveal deeper realities within the human experience; however, I contend that this is not the case in texts such as *Vanity Fair* and *La Curée* because the concept breaks down and does not meet its promises in the two novels. Because of the subversive potential of *tableaux vivants* and charades, natural acting fails to reveal any particular deeper "reality" surrounding the female players; in other words, they cannot render these women's bodies and beings legible. Below, via an examination of the metaphor of these domestic performances in the two novels, I reevaluate Voskuil's propositions.

Subversive Theatricals: Charades, Tableaux Vivants, and the Failure of "Acting Naturally"

Becky Sharp and Renée Saccard function within *Vanity Fair* and *La Curée* as sites for the interrogation of the negotiation of identity during the rapidly changing circumstances of the nineteenth century. The two heroines' performances and close association with a variety of fakes highlight the emerging conception of the social categories of gender, class, and nation as malleable. Manipulative, though equally manipulated, these women demonstrate the increasing fluidity of such social categories during the mid-nineteenth century and reveal that the categories themselves may equally be "fakes." Both Becky and Renée are characterized as puppets—of the authors of their novels, of the other characters, and, perhaps most important, of their individual situations. The "famous little Becky Puppet" is, of course, subject to the machinations of the authorial Puppet Master and is a victim of her circumstances in life: "I think I could be a good woman if I had five thousand a year" (490), she muses, and Thackeray responds, not altogether sarcastically, "And who knows but Rebecca was right in her speculations—and that it was only a question of money and fortune which made the difference between her and an honest woman?" (490). Becky Sharp seems to be ultimately in greater control of her identity and destiny than her French counterpart, Renée, who spirals into the depths of debt, depravity, and ennui in the Naturalist *La Curée*.

Zola marks his female protagonist as a dupe of both her husband and her lover-stepson. At the climax of the novel, Zola declares, "C'étaient ces gens qui l'avaient mise

nue. Saccard avait dégrafé le corsage, et Maxime avait fait tomber la jupe….A présent, elle se trouvait sans un lambeau, avec des cercles d'or, comme une esclave" (312) (These were the men who had stripped her naked. Saccard had unhooked her bodice, and Maxime had removed her skirt…. Now she remained without a shred of clothing, with her gold ringlets, like a slave [268]). Though Renée is much more overtly characterized as incapable of controlling her life and future, both Becky and Renée are consistently described as fashioners of their own identities, despite, and perhaps thanks to, their characterization as puppets. These women fashion their identities theatrically, "acting naturally" but never revealing the demarcation between their performances and their "authentic" selves. Analyzing Becky and Renée's performativity, as well as the fake in the form of lies, *faux* maternity, illicit speculation, false reputations, and political imposters, I consider how Thackeray and Zola make it clear that both heroines are playing roles in opposition to what the authors establish as their *natural* or inherent roles, specifically regarding their femininity, socioeconomic position, and national identity.

The History and Social Function of Parlor Theatricals

Some of the most stunning passages in *Vanity Fair* and *La Curée* contain a dramatic parlor production. These scenes, along with the female protagonists' presentations at court, which I discuss in greater detail below, mark the height of their social ascendance. In *Vanity Fair*, Becky induces Lord Steyne to give a splendid party at Gaunt House, and the revelers participate in the fashionable pastime of charades. The

daughter of a French opera girl, Becky is an inherently talented actress and wows the crowd with her portrayals of Clytemnestra and a marquise with a talented singing voice. Zola's novel features Renée as a ravishing Echo, the nymph, in *Les amours du beau Narcisse et la nymphe Echo*, directed by the absurdly erudite M. Hupel de la Noue, who has drawn this production from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Renée is furthermore shocking in her choice of dress or, rather, lack of dress, during the party following the *tableaux*. In both novels, the domestic dramas function as *mises en abyme* within the greater plotlines of the works.[97] While the actors do not actually portray Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon within Thackeray's charade, this slaying is implied as "she snatches the dagger out of Aegisthus's hand, and advantances [sic] to the bed. You see it shining over her head in the glimmer of the lamp, and—and the lamp goes out with a groan" (598). This frighteningly triumphant scene foreshadows Becky's possible murder of Jos at the end of the novel.[98] In *La Curée*, on the other hand, the "désirs inassouvis" (289) (unsatisfied desires [245]) which kill Echo undoubtedly represent Renée's incestuous passion for Maxime and her unfulfilled longing for "autre chose" (46) (something different [9]) that she expresses to her stepson as she languishes in her carriage with him

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97 See also Sharon Mouanda's "*Mises en abyme* in Zola's *La Curée*," *Modern Language Review* 103 (2008) 35-45, for further discussion of this trope in *La Curée*.

98 Scholars have debated Jos's ambiguous demise within *Vanity Fair*. Amelia's brother dies suddenly near the end of the novel, leaving behind him a sizeable insurance policy that he had recently taken out on his life, half of which would go to the little seductress upon his death. The novel reads, implying that Becky has murdered Jos for the money: "The solicitor of the Insurance Company swore it was the blackest case that ever had come before him; talked of sending a commission to Aix to examine the death, and the Company refused payment of the policy" (808). Of course, the inconsistent narrator neither confirms nor denies Becky's guilt.

in the Bois de Boulogne at the beginning of the novel. Furthermore, *Metamorphoses*, Ovid's collection of transformation tales, is a signicant intertext to *La Curée*, with its focus on the drastic transformations taking place in Paris during the Second Empire. These *tableaux vivants* and their close cousins, charades, while usually a part of a characteristically middle- and upper-class tradition of home entertainment conforming to established societal codes, could become subversive spaces that deny the expected readability of social categories.

In Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* and Zola's *La Curée*, women appear in these domestic dramatic productions that reduce female bodies to images and transform women into works of art. The charade in Thackeray's novel and the *tableau vivant* in Zola's text are sites of tension that underscore the construction of gendered and classed bodies in Britain and France during the nineteenth century. Though different in their execution, charades and *tableaux vivants* are both parlor productions that subjected women to the male gaze via the manipulation and immobilization of their bodies. In *tableaux vivants*, or "living pictures," actors (usually women) pose motionless to imitate famous paintings or scenes from history and myth, presenting static, panoramic images to drawing room audiences. While female bodies in charades are not literally stationary, they are frequently silenced and thus symbolically immobilized. Dialogue is often missing from either the charades themselves or from the literary descriptions thereof, but audience members, intended to remain quiet, impulsively break the silences of these productions in many cases.

Below, I examine the performances of "Agamemnon" in *Vanity Fair* and *Les amours du beau Narcisse et la nymphe Echo* in *La Curée* as attempts to mediate anxiety

about class and gender by exposing and, indeed, exaggerating the link between women and artifice. Becky, Renée, and the other performers are supposedly rendered legible by the static space of the charade or *tableau vivant* through the manipulating effects of the male gaze. Silenced and/or immobilized, these women could, theoretically, more easily be understood and deciphered by audience members, just a statues, intended for viewer's enjoyment, might be observed and interpreted by eager museum-goers. However, this immobility is unachievable, for silences are interrupted, and cramped limbs tire of their stationary attitudes. Ultimately, disruptions to these "static" performative spaces reaffirm the illegibility of class and gender during the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Such unexpected interruptions to the stasis and stability of charades and *tableaux vivants* take the form of sound and movement, as well as of metaphorical disruptions to the theatricals, such as violence and "mutiny" against the production's director.

Charades and *tableaux vivants* evolved into their nineteenth-century manifestations as parlor pastimes via a long, intricate history of public and private theatricals, including liturgical dramas, monodramas, pantomimes, and attitudes;[99] furthermore, as Jennifer Fischer argues, much of contemporary performance art "can be understood in continuity with *tableaux vivants* in both their sensorial and identificatory aesthetics."[100] The *tableau vivant* as nineteenth-century audiences knew it became fashionable thanks to Lady Emma Hamilton and her performances of "attitudes" in Italy

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99 Kirsten Gram Holmström, *Monodrama Attitudes Tableaux Vivants: Studies on some trends of theatrical fashion 1770-1815* (Stockholm: Almquist and Wiksell, 1967).

100 Jennifer Fischer, "Interperformance: The Live Tableaux of Suzanne Lacy, Janine Antoni, and Marina Abramovic," *Art Journal* 56.4 (1997) 29 Web, 15 Oct. 2011.

in the late-eighteenth century (Fischer 28). Goethe's descriptions of her performances (Fischer 28), as well as his 1809 novel *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, are said to have popularized the *tableau vivant* as a new genre of both art and entertainment (Holmström 216). The *tableau*'s theatrical relation, the charade, was brought from France to Britain where, when fused with the well-established practice of private amateur theatricals, it thrived as a favorite activity of the middle and upper classes.[101] At the dawn of their popularity in the 1770s, charades took the form of written rebuses, puzzles for individuals to solve by piecing together a word's syllables. When these charades merged with dramatic modes in the 1830s, they became a form of drawing room entertainment that upwardly-aspiring members of the middle classes particularly adored (Bryan 32, 34).

The scopophilic pleasure felt by bourgeois audiences watching charades and *tableaux vivants* transformed female bodies into objects to be enjoyed as well as known and understood. During this rapidly changing age of social mobility, shifting economic classes, industrialization, and commercialization, cultural anxiety about interpreting women's appearances and deciphering their gender and class identities was rampant, but such performances were intended to be ways of alleviating some of the confusion about identity and the surrounding overwhelming transformation. Charades and *tableaux vivants* in both Britain and France were entrenched in worlds of etiquette and codified social behavior, as each genre was meant to reflect social standards and illustrate established norms for proper comportment. They were potentially subversive genres

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101 Emily Bryan, "Nineteenth-Century Charade Dramas: Syllables of Gentility and Sociability" *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film*. 29.1 (2002) 32 Web, 15 Feb. 2012.

because they might evoke contemporary cultural concerns (Bryan 41) or deny viewers any possibility of coherently reading women's identities. Women sometimes served as writers and/or directors of such parlor productions and thus had the power to make a social commentary, for example, on gender roles or the institution of marriage, through these forms, particularly the charade, while remaining faithful to societal standards and codes. More often, however, charades and *tableaux* functioned as sites through which women might assert their social positions. While they do not produce any particular social commentary, the theatricals in *Vanity Fair* and *La Curée* do allow Becky and Renée to establish their social importance and show off their attractions and talents. Thackeray describes the phenomenon of the charade, which "was considerably in vogue…enabling the many ladies amongst us who had beauty to display their charms, and the fewer number who had cleverness to exhibit their wit" (595). A goal of these parlor theatricals was for women to establish their places as cultivated, successful members of the bourgeoisie or aristocracy, whether they served as writers, directors, actors, or hostesses for the productions. While charades and *tableaux vivants* did function to regulate society and reaffirm women's social roles, particularly through their immobilization and silencing of women, these forms of social entertainment in *Vanity Fair* and *La Curée*, in their attempts to render women's bodies legible, ultimately highlight the impossibility of accurately interpreting surfaces within the rapidly changing social and economic climate of nineteenth-century Britain and France.

Interruptions and Immobility in "Agamemnon" and *Les amours du beau Narcisse*

The dazzling charade performances in Thackeray's novel present Becky Sharp in all of her splendor. A theatrical genius, she wows the crowd with her portrayals of Clytemnestra in the first charade, which I discuss here, and a marquise with a heavenly voice in the second charade, "Nightingale." In the first charade, an Orientalist masterpiece representing the first two syllables, "aga," the third and fourth syllables, "Memnon," and finally, the entire word, Becky appears as the eerie and cunning Greek murderess. Interestingly, the only female character besides Clytemnestra whom Thackeray describes within the charades is equated with the Oriental "Other," veiled and begging on her knees to be released to her homeland and her fiancé waiting there for her. The players speak very few words, and the words they do speak, such as Zuleikah's pleas, are not shared with the reader. Ushered in by a slave merchant, Zuleikah, played by Mrs. Winkworth, is silenced, manipulated, and imprisoned by her male captors as well as by the imaginations of the audience members and readers.

On the other hand, Becky appears as Clytemnestra, mesmerizing the audience with her ghostly appearance. She "glides swiftly into the room like an apparition—her arms are bare and white—her tawny hair floats down her shoulder—her face is deadly pale—and her eyes are lighted up with a smile so ghastly, that people quake as they look at her" (598). A sharp contrast to the captive Mrs. Winkworth, Becky captivates the charade's viewers and in fact, manipulates and paralyzes the audience, instead of vice-versa**.** Furthermore, in this scene marked by silence (Aegisthus, played by Becky's husband, Rawdon, "tiptoes" and Becky "glides," so as not to awaken the sleeping

Agamemnon), two spoken interruptions ring out. First, an audience member cries, "Good God!...it's Mrs. Rawdon Crawley!" (598). Then, when Aegisthus fails to kill Agamemnon, Clytemnestra steals the dagger from her lover and raises it to murder her husband herself. However, this violent act does not appear on stage: viewers simply "see [the dagger] shining over her head in the glimmer of the lamp, and—and the lamp goes out with a groan, and all is dark" (598). This groan provides the second interruption to the silence of the charade. Both disruptions serve as attempts to pinpoint Becky Sharp's identity. While the exclamation from an audience member seeks to situate Becky as merely the wife of Captain Crawley, the charade, via Agamemnon's groan, endeavors to portray her as a scheming *femme fatale*. As described above, this frighteningly triumphant scene foreshadows Jos's death, likely at Becky's hand, at the end of the novel. The violence of Becky's lowering of the dagger to kill Agamemnon further disturbs the coherence of the charade. It is impossible, however, to render the novel's heroine legible, for Becky is a woman of unknown origin, whose class, gender, and national identities are perpetually under construction.

In *La Curée*, M. de la Noue directs the cast of nine women in the *tableaux*, with the addition of the perpetually feminized Maxime, in his production. Under his attentive and slightly obsessive direction, the women are costumed and positioned; similarly, he controls the meaning and possible interpretations of his *tableaux* by explicating the first two scenes to any men willing to listen to his diegesis. However, his female players are constantly challenging de la Noue's control of the production, thus jeopardizing the stasis and stability the director tries to bring to the *tableaux*. First, the women are adamant

about their costume preferences: "La question des costumes fut beaucoup plus laborieuse. Maxime donna un bon coup de main au préfet, qui se trouvait sur les dents, au milieu de neuf femmes, dont l'imagination folle menaçait de compromettre gravement la pureté de lignes de son œuvre" (273) (The question of costumes was far more complicated. Maxime eagerly assisted the prefect, who found himself exhausted by nine women whose extravagant imaginations seriously threatened to compromise his work's purity of outline [229-230]). Immediately prior to the production, de la Noue rushes around in a panic, searching for lost accessories and making sure his actors are placed on stage to his liking, despite their seeming efforts to interfere with his production.

De la Noue's control over the *tableaux* becomes increasingly tenuous as the third act opens. While he has previously successfully manipulated and immobilized his actors' bodies, they finally refuse his control. In particular, "les deux inséparables" (the two inseparables), Suzanne Haffner and Adeline d'Espanet, former schoolmates understood to be in a lesbian relationship, perpetually sabotage the *tableaux*, rendering their own bodies unreadable and the *tableaux* incomprehensible for many of the observers. Adeline, in the first scene, cannot help moving and barely stifles her laughter: "Le premier tableau marcha bien, sauf cette folle d'Adeline qui bougeait et qui retenait à grand-peine une irrésistible envie de rire" (280) (The first tableau went off well, except that foolish Adeline was fidgety and had a hard time suppressing an overwhelming urge to laugh [237]). Finally, the actors begin the third *tableau* without consulting the director at all, and Suzanne, of course, must be at fault. Zola writes, "Elles s'étaient placées toute seules! Ce devait être cette petite d'Espanet qui avait monté le complot de hâter les

changements de costume, et de se passer de lui" (287-288) (They had placed themselves on stage! It must have been the little Espanet woman who had organized the conspiracy to speed up the costume changes and make do without his advice [244]). The actors' "mutiny" against de la Noue causes a few of the characters, such as Echo, to be placed incorrectly on stage and equally creates a disruption in the director's explication of his *tableaux*. He is so irritated that he refuses to describe what is happening on the scene to Messieurs Mignon and Charrier. However, de la Noue then regrets refusing to explicate his work to the admiring viewers: "il éprouva un regret mortel d'avoir cédé à la colère en n'expliquant pas la dernière page de son poème. Il voulut donner alors aux personnes qui l'entouraient la clef des choses charmantes, grandioses ou simplement polissonnes, que représentait le beau Narcisse et la nymphe Écho" (289-290) (he felt a pang of regret that he had given in to his anger instead of explaining the final page of his poem. He then wanted to let the people around him in on the key to all the charming, grandiose, or merely naughty things that handsome Narcissus and Echo the nymph represented [246]). Because he does not expound upon the mythological plots surrounding his *tableaux* and the philosophical significance of his *mise-en-scène,* audience members such as Mignon and Charrier are unable to understand his production.

In these three *tableaux*, thanks to the female actors, bodies literally fail to be subjected to the director's control: the characters do not maintain their proper poses, smile inappropriately as they stifle laughter, and nearly turn their heads due to neck cramps. The *tableaux* and their director cannot manipulate and immobilize Renée, "the inseparables," and the other actors. Renée, with her "désirs inassouvis" (289) for

material and sexual decadence, and Suzanne and Adeline, with their unspeakable desire for one another, fail to fit neatly into social categories defined by gender and/or class. Thus, like Becky Sharp, with her identity constantly in flux, they cannot be fully subject to the controlling power of the male gaze.

These charades and *tableaux vivants* shed light on the anxiety about women's legibility by capitalizing on the connection between women and deception or artfulness in the nineteenth-century cultural consciousness. By presenting women as performers, charades and *tableaux* exaggerate and serve to socially affirm the imagined link between women and artifice. Charades and *tableaux vivants* endeavor to create stability within a rapidly changing world in order to make this world, and the people in it—especially women—decipherable and understandable**.** Though such productions usually seek to render feminine identity knowable, they, in fact, serve to illustrate the illegibility of class and gender within Thackeray's and Zola's texts. Ideally, audiences during the mid- to late-nineteenth century should be able to read the female performers as middle-class ladies and upstanding wives and mothers (or future wives and mothers) because the performances subject the actors to codes of etiquette and social norms of the day. However, women such as Becky, Renée, and "les deux inséparables" cannot be read and understood because, within the rapidly changing social and economic climate of nineteenth-century Britain and France, appearances do not always reflect reality. Charades and *tableaux vivants* thus appear in these two novels as subversive spaces that ultimately deny any expected legibility of social categories in nineteenth-century Britain and France.

The Failure of Domestic Dramas

The failure of the charade and the *tableau vivant* to render women's bodies silent, static, and hence, legible sheds light on the failure of "acting naturally" in *Vanity Fair* and *La Curée*. I propose a reconsideration of Voskuil's theory of "acting naturally," for in these two novels, while the authentic and the theatrical *are* often reconciled, the domestic dramas do not help audience members to understand and interpret the actress's identities or female identities in general. Becky and Renée, such shape-shifters in their everyday lives, excel at acting in a theatrical setting; indeed, as they play in these domestic dramatic productions, they tend to blur their "authentic" and "theatrical" identities, making it impossible for viewers to divine any deeper realities from their performances. It is no coincidence that Becky, in particular, aware of her inborn talents as an actress, is able to enthrall and manipulate a rapt audience both in the drawing room and from the stage. While Renée is less dramatically successful than her British counterpart, the partygoers at the Saccards' do nonetheless admire her greatly for her convincing portrayal of insatiable yearnings. Zola notes, "[T]ous les éloges furent pour l'expression de visage de Renée. Selon le mot de M. Hupel de la Noue, elle était 'la douleur du désir inassouvi.' Elle avait un sourire aigu qui cherchait à se faire humble, elle quêtait sa proie avec des supplications de louve affamée qui ne cache ses dents qu'à demi" (280) ([T]he lion's share of the praise was reserved for the expression on Renée's face. As M. Hupel de la Noue put it, she represented 'the suffering of unsatisfied desire.' She wore a smile that she tried to disguise as humble and tracked her prey as hungrily as a she-wolf, her teeth only half hidden" [237]). Ironically, she is, of course, but

reproducing her longing for Maxime onstage. Paradoxically, this is one of Renée's most "authentic" moments within the text; this revelation of authenticity within the theatrical production shows how Voskuil's concept of "acting naturally" seems at first to live up to its potential. However, because of the subversive capacity of charades and *tableaux vivants*, which fail to create legible bodies out of the female performers' unruly bodies in these novels, "acting naturally" does not keep its promises in *Vanity Fair* and *La Curée* by shedding light on the female performers' identities against the backdrop of a dizzying world.

Throughout the two texts, charades and *tableaux vivants* function as metaphors for women's performances of identity within a rapidly changing society, for these productions, on a domestic level, are attempts at reducing female players to easily readable feminine identities. In the social sphere, Becky and Renée perform feminine, French or British, and middle- or upper-class identities, which the world around them is constantly trying to control and understand. The paradox that performance and authenticity become compatible both within these parlor productions and the larger nineteenth century social world, however, could not, as "acting naturally" promises, help the French and British better understand the social universe and its inhabitants in the nineteenth century.

FALSELY FEMININE AND FAILED MOTHERS: BECKY AND RENÉE'S NEGOTIATION OF GENDER

Throughout *Vanity Fair* and *La Curée*, the instability of gender identity is highlighted via the representation of Becky and Renée as potentially masculine women and as failed mothers. Particularly within their relationships to men, the female protagonists are often portrayed as "wearing the pants," while their partners, Rawdon and Maxime, are represented as passive and effeminate. Furthermore, neither succeeds at childrearing, the ultimate sign, perhaps, in the nineteenth century, of a woman who has accomplished her role in life. Becky sends little Rawdy off to a nurse and forgets about him, while Renée miscarries after her rape and never conceives a child with her husband or her lover. The fact that neither Becky nor Renée adheres to the standards of femininity and expectations of womanhood for their social and temporal milieus reveals how Thackeray, Zola, and perhaps other novelists of the period are beginning to communicate within their works the idea that certain traits traditionally signifying femininity, such as maternity, are not inherent.

Masculine Heroines and Feminine Fakes

Becky and Renée are marked by stereotypically masculine traits throughout *Vanity Fair* and *La Curée*. The English heroine is assertive, controlling, intelligent, and strong. Her husband, shortly after their secret wedding, finds "himself converted into a very happy and submissive married man" (191); Becky, on the other hand, always retains

the dominant position in their relationship, controlling in particular their personal and financial affairs. Before the pair leave Brighton where they have honeymooned, the young wife commands her husband to compose a letter in order to ingratiate them to his aunt, Miss Crawley, who has threatened to disinherit him because of his rash marriage. Becky orders Rawdon, "You will now, if you please, my dear, sit down at the writing-table and pen a pretty little letter to Miss Crawley, in which you'll say that you are a good boy, and that sort of thing" (288). Playing the role of a man giving orders to his secretary, or perhaps even, a general or emperor commanding his troops, "She could not help laughing at his rueful countenance, and marching up and down the room with her hands behind her, the little woman began to dictate a letter, which he took down" (289). Similar scenarios are repeated throughout the novel. Later, after Rawdon's success on the battlefield, Becky sends Miss Crawley a package with war relics and a letter allegedly from the newly promoted Colonel Crawley. Becky has purchased these battlefield spoils from a peddler; she sends them to Miss Crawley in a conniving attempt to curry favor with their aunt, using Rawdon's supposed heroism to win her over. The counterfeit war relics and accompanying forged letters solidify Becky's masculine nature, cunningness, and propensity for fakery and performance. By commanding her husband to compose letters to his rich aunt, manipulating their landlord and creditors (she handles their debt like a "professional man" [426]), managing her family's fiscal matters, and lording over Rawdon and others, Becky takes on masculine traits that underscore the impossibility of pinpointing whether her gender is inherent or performed.

In Renée and Maxime's relationship, their gender roles are reversed as well. Hours before their incestuous relationship begins, the stepson gazes at his stepmother through the smoke of his cigar at Café Riche. Zola describes the young man's thoughts: "Par moments, il n'était plus sûr de son sexe; la grande ride qui lui traversait le front, l'avancement boudeur de ses lèvres, son air indécis de myope, en faisait un grand jeune homme" (184) (At times he was no longer quite sure of her sex. The large wrinkle across her forehead, the pouting protrusion of her lips, and the vagueness in her eyes because of her nearsightedness made her look like a nearly grown young man [144]). When they have sex in the restaurant's private room, Maxime blames Renée's utter lack of femininity for their fatal gaffe. In the cab on the way home, Maxime muses, "Avait-on jamais vu une femme se fagoter de la sorte! On ne lui voyait pas même le cou. Il l'avait prise pour un garçon, il jouait avec elle, et ce n'était pas sa faute, si le jeu est devenu sérieux" (188) (Had anyone ever seen a woman done up like that before? You couldn't even see her neck. He had mistaken her for a boy, he'd been playing with her, and it wasn't his fault if things had taken a serious turn [148]). Her body proves once again to be illegible to others, rendering it impossible to tell whether her performance of gender is really a performance. What Maxime reads as Renée's boyishness becomes the prompt for their first sexual encounter.

While her attire may make her seem an adolescent boy, not unlike her stepson, her sexual prowess is fully masculine. Some of Maxime and Renée's most titillating love scenes take place in the greenhouse, where, before their first encounter there, Maxime faints. Incapacitated by the heat of the room, Maxime comes to, but remains supine on

the bearskin rug they have placed on the greenhouse floor. In this position of passiveness, he is feminized, while Renée gains newfound virility: "Renée était l'homme, la volonté passionnée et agissante. Maxime subissait. Cet être neutre, blond et joli, frappé dès l'enfance dans sa virilité, devenait, aux bras curieux de la jeune femme, une grande fille….Renée jouissait de ses dominations, elle pliait sous sa passion cette créature où le sexe hésitait toujours" (216-217) (Renée was the man, the passionate and active will. Maxime submitted….[T]his pretty, fair-haired, neutered boy, stricken in his virility since youth, became a strapping girl in this young woman's inquisitive arms….Renée relished her dominance, bending this creature of still-dubious sexuality to her passion [174]). Renée and Maxime are equally of *dubious* sexuality and gender. *Dubious* can be defined as doubtful, ambiguous, and suspect: Renée's gender can certainly be described by all three of these adjectives. Like Thackeray's characterization of Becky as a powerful, masculinized woman, Zola's depiction of the role reversal between stepmother and stepson highlights the idea of gender as a charade: not only can it be understood as a performance, but also, this performance fails to render Renée's gender identity decipherable.

Aborted Maternity in *Vanity Fair* and *La Curée*

Becky and Renée's failed maternity likewise situates them as dubiously feminine, somehow imperfect, or even false, women. Rawdon's love for their son far exceeds his wife's; when Rawdon, Jr. is placed with a nurse shortly after his birth, his father alone

visits him. Thackeray describes Becky's feelings for her son, and her son's for her: "Rebecca did not care much to go see the son and heir. Once he spoiled a new dove-coloured pelisse of hers. He preferred his nurse's caresses to his mamma's, and when finally he quitted that jolly nurse and almost parent, he cried loudly for hours" (424). Two pages later, little Rawdon nearly drowns when neglected by Becky's maid, and Thackeray devotes as little attention to the subject as Rawdon's mother apparently does. His father is crazy about him, and the boy's aunt, Lady Jane, is enamored with Rawdy as well. When Becky and Lady Jane first become acquainted, they bond over their love for their progeny and ardently discuss childcare. The latter learns eventually, however, that Becky's love for her son Rawdon, like many of Becky's characteristics, is but a hoax. When Becky comes groveling to Sir Pitt and Lady Jane asking for charity after she has been ruined, Lady Jane opens Pitt's eyes to his sister-in-law's true nature. She believes Becky to be, she declares,

> a wicked woman—a heartless mother, a false wife! She never loved her dear little boy, who used to fly here and tell me of her cruelty to him. She never came into the family but she strove to bring misery with her, and to weaken the most sacred affections with her wicked flattery and falsehoods. She has deceived her husband, as she has deceived everybody; her soul is black with vanity, worldliness, and all sorts of crime. I tremble when I touch her. I keep my children out of her sight. (642)

To Pitt's wife, Becky's first and gravest fault is that she is bad mother. Lady Jane thus gives Pitt an ultimatum: he must never allow the woman to enter his house again, or his

wife and children will leave their abode with him forever. Thanks to Lady Jane, Becky has no hope of re-ascending the social ladder in England. Furthermore, her sister-in-law raises little Rawdon after Becky flees the country, and, ironically, he gains the baronetcy that his father might otherwise have held and which would have brought Becky the title of lady for which she had always clamored. Becky's lack of maternal inclinations and appalling treatment of her offspring are decisive when Lady Jane must stand up against her husband, whom Becky has successfully flattered and cajoled; her failed or *faux* maternity is equally the supreme indicator of Becky's falseness.

Renée, on the other hand, never bears children. She becomes pregnant when she is a victim of rape; Saccard saves her from the grave social stigma of unwed motherhood by marrying her. However, shortly after their marriage, Renée miscarries and does not become pregnant again. When she and Saccard wed, "Elle était alors enceinte de quatre mois; son mari allait l'envoyer à la campagne, comptant mentir sur l'âge d'enfant, lorsque…elle fit une fausse couche. Elle s'était tellement serrée pour dissimuler sa grossesse, qui, d'ailleurs, disparaissait sous l'ampleur de ses jupes, qu'elle fut obligée de garder le lit pendant plusieurs semaines" (110-111) (Renée was then four months pregnant. Her husband was about to send her to the country in order to be able to lie about the child's age later on when…she miscarried. She had laced herself up so tightly to hide her condition, which in any case was concealed by the fullness of her skirts, that she was obliged to take to bed for several weeks [72]). Because of her attempt to dissimulate her pregnancy with this illegitimate child, she fails to become a mother and, ultimately, does not completely fulfill the expectations for her gender. Julia K. De Pree

analyzes the semantics of the terms *fausse couche* and *miscarriage*, explaining, "The English prefix *mis* in miscarriage marks negativity and failure…. In French, the term *fausse couche* implies a false act that somehow lies on the other side of the real act, as if the miscarriage would be a ghost version of some past or future creation. The contrast of falseness versus truth is inscribed semantically in both languages."[102] Renée's aborted pregnancy and thus abortive maternity serve to further inscribe her with the language of falseness that characterizes her.

Falsely feminine and failed mother, Renée, like Becky, defies the traditional boundaries of gender during the mid-nineteenth century. Furthermore, their unsuccessful maternity reveals the breakdown of "acting naturally" because, while Becky's and Renée's performances (or non-performances) of motherhood fail to reveal the boundary between their individual subjectivity and the "characters" they are supposed to be playing, that is, good wives and mothers, they likewise neglect to expose any greater truths about Becky's and Renée's gender identity. Indeed, we see that in these two novels, Thackeray and Zola hint that gender, after all, may be yet another kind of fake, something that can be put on or cast aside, like a role in a domestic theatrical production.

UNENDING IOUS AND THE PERFORMANCE OF CLASS

Much as they challenge the limitations and expectations of socially imposed gender identities, Becky and Renée equally defy class boundaries through their perpetual

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102 Julia K. De Pree, "*La Fausse couche*: Failed Potential and the Anti-Enlightenment," *Romance Quarterly* 49.1 (2002): 30-35.

upward mobility and abuse of credit throughout their respective novels. With their husbands, the heroines make a show of their nonexistent fortunes in order to gain and retain their desired social positions. Rawdon is complacent and happy to allow Becky to manage the couple's finances; Renée's husband, on the other hand, is an infamous speculator and cheat. Aristide builds his real estate empire and investment portfolio on the impending future of Haussmannization, "faux locataires" (118) (sham tenants [79]), falsified books for imaginary businesses, and a variety of fraudulent and shady business transactions. Indeed, his first business investment is his underhanded marriage to Renée. Like Becky Sharp (though more extravagant as well as more blatantly and maliciously dishonest), Saccard establishes his home on credit and never has the cash one would expect to accompany such a luxurious lifestyle. Zola writes, "Il habitait un hôtel de deux millions, il vivait sur le pied d'une dotation de prince, et certains matins il n'avait pas mille francs dans sa caisse. Ses dépenses ne paraissaient pas diminuer. Il vivait sur la dette, parmi un peuple de créanciers qui engloutissaient au jour le jour les bénéfices scandaleux qu'il réalisait dans certaines affaires" (192) (He lived in a house worth two millions francs, on a princely allowance, yet some mornings he didn't have a thousand francs in his safe. His expenses did not appear to be diminishing. He survived on debt, surrounded by a horde of creditors who from one day to the next devoured the scandalous profits he realized on certain of his dealings" [151]). Here, I focus on the novels' female protagonists and their relationship to debt; however, Aristide Saccard's deceit and fraudulence further demonstrate how replete the fake is in Zola's novel. Becky and

Renée's survival on credit is significant because it exposes the idea that social class, like gender, is but another charade.

Becky and Renée are experts at living luxuriously without ever paying the price for their lifestyle. Though the former does settle a few of their long overdue bills in London—she "purchased, with fifteen hundred pounds of ready money, more than ten times that amount of debts" (426)—the English heroine ultimately never repays in full any of the money she owes. After settling their accounts in London, of course, she and Rawdon continue to live like royalty and accumulate even more debt. Renée, on the other hand, is held responsible for her indebtedness to Worms; interestingly, after her death, the only legacy that Renée leaves is her bill from her dressmaker. Zola notes, in the final two lines of *La Curée*, "L'hiver suivant, lorsque Renée mourut d'une méningite aiguë, ce fut son père qui paya ses dettes. La note de Worms se montait à deux cent cinquante-sept mille francs" (338) (The following winter, when Renée died of acute meningitis, it was her father who paid off her debts. The bill from Worms came to 257,000 francs [294]). Becky's reliance on credit is, like most of her actions, overtly and deliberately manipulative; on the other hand, Renée, victim of Zola's determinism, makes her irrational purchases impulsively and seems simply to be driven by the circumstances of her life into this debt, though we do witness her conscious choices to take on increasing expenses she cannot afford. Their abuse of credit is yet another form of fakery in which these women engage. The word "credit" relates to trust, faith, or belief in a person; the *OED* gives this definition of "credit": "Favourable estimation, good name,

honour, reputation, repute."[103] Thus, Becky and Renée, by their abuse of the credit that vendors extend to them, falsify their "good name[s], honour," and especially, "reputation[s]." Their false reputations allow them to sculpt their equally falsified class identities.

"How to Live Well on Nothing a Year"

In two of the most brilliant and satirical chapters of Thackeray's novel, "How to live well on Nothing a Year" and "The Subject continued," the author outlines precisely how Becky and Rawdon, as well as other members of the English middle class, might appear to live prosperously on little to no income. Becky, daughter of a painter and opera girl, is a member of the working class by birth and marries a gambler and member of the provincial aristocracy. Rawdon has no hope of money except for a bequest from Miss Crawley; unfortunately, he is disinherited. His wife, on the other hand, aspires to gain the title of lady and acts accordingly. Because of her social ambitions, Becky spends money that she and her husband do not possess in order to appear wealthier than they indeed are, setting up their home on Curzon Street with "the prettiest little salons conceivable…decorated with the greatest taste and a thousand nicknacks from Paris" (432). Thackeray parodies the myriad members of British society who manage their money just as the Colonel and Mrs. Crawley do:

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103 "Credit," Def. 5b, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2011, Web, 16 August 2011.

> I cannot but own that the appearance of the Jenkinses in the Park, in the large barouche with the grenadier-footman, will surprise and mystify me to my dying day; for though I know the equipage is only jobbed, and all the Jenkinses people are on board wages, yet those three men and the carriage must represent an expense of six hundred a year at the very least—and then there are the splendid dinners, the two boys at Eton, the prize governess and masters for the girls, the trip abroad…who, I say, with the most good-natured feelings in the world, can help wondering how the Jenkinses make out matters? What *is* Jenkins? (418)

The author continues to caricature these harmless phonies who, apparently, make up no small part of the bourgeoisie. He suggests that "every one of…[us] can point to some families of his acquaintance who live nobody knows how" (419) and asserts that the Crawleys' acquaintances posed the same questions about them. In these two chapters, Thackeray describes how Becky and Rawdon live in the manner that the Jenkinses live, buying fine clothing and household furnishings, throwing parties, and generally abusing poor Raggles, their trusty landlord and greengrocer, for neither he nor the other merchants are ever fully repaid for their services and wares. On two occasions, once in Paris in "How to live well on Nothing a Year," and later in London after Becky's illicit relationship with Lord Steyne is discovered, Rawdon and Becky rapidly flee their homes, evading their creditors, to whom they owe thousands of pounds.

While the couple is still able to successfully fool everyone, Becky's illegitimate financial transactions, as Thackeray describes, along with her "wit, cleverness, and flippancy made her speedily the vogue in London among a certain class" (432). She even

goes so far as to claim the aristocratic French family, the Montmorencys, for her ancestors in order further elevate herself socially. The English heroine relies on this false reputation she has established to craft a deceptive identity for herself. Becky Sharp, according to Sarah Malton, embodies the

> 'new type' of personality that an economy based on ever-expanding relations of intangible credit and debt engenders…. In a culture where you can live handsomely on 'Nothing a Year,' identity is increasingly constructed through the outward appropriation of objects and unhinged from conventional registers of moral worth and value. You buy things you cannot afford by paying money you do not have, so that you can fabricate a lifestyle, and even a genealogy, that is not your own in order to become someone you are not. (9)

Without a doubt, Becky fabricates such a lifestyle for herself and her husband, taking advantage of the economic circumstances of the period and its "ever-expanding relations of intangible credit and debt." Her illegitimate and thus dubious financial transactions enable her performance of an upper-class, at times even aristocratic, identity. Indeed, the abuse of credit functions, in both *Vanity Fair* and *La Curée*, as an interruption to the period's economic system, much like interruptions to the stasis and stability of the *tableaux vivants* and the charades in the respective novels. While the judicious and restrained *use* of credit is intended to function to help buyers remain a part of the social class assigned to them by birth, its unmitigated *abuse* allows consumers to defy the boundaries of their inherited economic stations. In short, the abuse of credit renders class identities illegible.

Fashionably Bankrupt

Renée's passion for fashion leads her to spend days on end and hundreds of thousands of francs in Worms's sartorial lair, "une chapelle consacrée à quelque secrète divinité" (138) (a chapel consecrated to some secret deity [99]). Thanks to this quasi-addiction to Worms's art, she commissions innumerable extravagant and usually eccentric ensembles from the dressmaker throughout *La Curée*, driving her deeply into debt. At first, her husband is happy to pay her IOUs to the *couturier*; eventually, however, Saccard allegedly finds himself in too great a financial trouble to rescue his wife. Furthermore, he realizes that as Renée becomes increasingly indebted to Worms, she will finally come groveling to him and hand over the land at Charonne that her aunt gave her as part of her dowry. As Saccard needs said land for a speculation that he intends to be the crowning jewel in his investment portfolio, he mercilessly sets a trap for his wife, so she will be obligated to turn to him to repay her debt to Worms. Her life as a Second Empire socialite full of ennui and searching for greater decadence and vice becomes increasingly expensive: "[P]uis elle se sentit pauvre à côté de son mari, et, la dette l'écrasant, elle dut avoir recours à lui, lui emprunter de l'argent, se mettre à sa discrétion. A chaque nouveau mémoire, qu'il payait avec un sourire d'homme tendre aux faiblesses humaines, elle se livrait un peu plus, lui confiait des titres de rente, l'autorisait à vendre ceci ou cela" (164) (She felt poor compared to her husband and, being overwhelmed by debt, was obliged to turn to him for assistance, to borrow money from him, and to rely on his discretion. With each new bill, which he paid with the smile of a man tolerant of human weakness, she surrendered a bit more of herself, entrusting him

with bonds or authorizing him to sell this or that property [124]). Renée's excessive materialism and thus, her abuse of credit and ensuing accumulation of debt, make her a victim of her once lower-class husband, yet further blurring the lines between the social classes of the nineteenth century.

In a provocative scene immediately following the consummation of Renée's relationship with Maxime at Café Riche, Renée languishes in front of her fireplace while Saccard obsessively pokes at the cinders. He has come to her bedroom to apologize for his inability to pay her 136,000-franc note to her dressmaker. A rude kiss on her neck sparks within Aristide a new desire for his wife, a desire that torments him for months. Later in the text, because the bill to Worms remains unpaid, Renée nearly prostitutes herself to M. de Saffré in order to repay her debts and Maxime's. However, Renée tells Mme. Sidonie, her conniving sister-in-law who suggests the affair with Saffré, as she flees her shop, suddenly changing her mind, "[J]e ne suis pas à vendre…Pardieu!...J'aime encore mieux mon mari" (239) (I'm not for sale…My God!...Even my husband is preferable to that [197]). Indeed, Renée does succumb to her husband's desires, offering both her sexual and financial assets to him. Husband and wife recommence their sexual relationship, though Saccard "n'usait plus de ses droits de mari depuis longtemps" (220) (had long since ceased to avail himself of his marital prerogatives [179]), and in exchange, he lends her money. She ultimately cedes her land at Charonne to him, sacrificing her last remaining property in an attempt to repay her debt to Worms.

Because of these financial and sexual transactions, both she and her husband are able to keep up appearances. Of course, doing so is the ultimate goal for both of them,

and particularly for the base businessman. Aristide is willing to, and does, in fact, go through with a number of maniacal schemes simply to prove to the world around him that he is part of the upper class. Wanting all of Paris to see him as rich and successful, Saccard takes advantage of his wife, who is, as Veblen explains in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, the "chief ornament"[104] of his domicile, and aids him in this task. Both Renée and her husband are successful at fooling their friends and enemies alike into believing they are prospering members of the *nouveau-riche*. Renée, descended from the aristocracy, has to continue these fraudulent transactions in order to save face and raise herself up from her marriage to the son of a peasant and bourgeoise. Ultimately, however, Renée's clothing is more transparent than her class identity. She and Becky Sharp violate the social and economic order by their abuse of credit. They perform classed and gendered identities through their economic fakery via their participation in contemporary commodity culture. Such dubious financial transactions render them illegible; one cannot decode Becky and Renée's social origins based on their appearance. Illustrations such as these of the abuse of credit in Thackeray's and Zola's novels function as a reflections not only on the potential theatricality of class identity, but also on the increasingly materialistic capitalist economy of the mid- to late-nineteenth century and its potential to unsettle the previously stable social schema.

104 Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* 1899 (New York: Penguin Books, 1994) 180.

NAPOLEONIC CLAPTRAP AND QUACKERY: NATIONAL FAKERY IN *VANITY FAIR* AND *LA CURÉE*

The two heroines perform Frenchness (and in Becky's case, occasionally, Englishness) as they perform their femininity and middle- or upper-class identity. Becky strategically employs Frenchness and the French language in particular in her social crusade to become a lady. Strikingly, in *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray often aligns Becky with Napoleon, while Zola associates Renée in *La Curée* with the emperor's nephew, Napoleon III. Both women fight battles, just as do their respective emperors; however, while Napoleon and Napoleon III engage in warfare in the traditional sense, Becky and Renée's battlefield is society. The female protagonists' performativity and artifice are even further highlighted by the characterization of the two French emperors, within the novels and historically, as imposters or, in other words, political fakes. Both rulers, as I discuss below, are frequently characterized as sham emperors, and Napoleon I is in many ways, a *faux* Frenchman. Once again, Becky and Renée's literal acting in the charades and *tableaux vivants* in the novels serves as a metaphor for their performance of identity: because of this exploitation of a variety of political fakes such as the French emperors in the novels, it becomes impossible to decode and unravel the female protagonists' national identities, particularly Becky's.

"Vive la France!": Becky's Frenchness

Becky is characterized as French from the opening pages of *Vanity Fair*, and her Frenchness, especially her deployment of the French language, is often equated with or given as a reason for her artifice and trickery. Her first words in the novel are, "Mademoiselle, je viens vous faire mes adieux" (13) (Miss, I come to bid you farewell), impeccably enunciated to the monolingual headmistress. This sarcastic and resentful departure from Miss Pinkerton and her school situates Becky as both French and deceptive, two attributes which remain inextricably entangled within the heroine's character throughout Thackeray's text. Becky takes great pleasure in speaking exclusively in French, allegedly her native language, to Miss Pinkerton: the headmistress has hired Becky to give lessons in the language at her school but does not speak the language herself. To firmly concretize Becky's identity as both false and French, Thackeray has her cry out to Amelia in the carriage when they leave their school, "*Vive la France! Vive l'Empereur! Vive Bonaparte!* (16). As the narrator explains, "this was the greatest blasphemy…; and in those days, in England, to say, 'Long live Bonaparte!' was as much as to say, 'Long live Lucifer!'" (16). The heroine surely exhibits her falseness in her traitorousness against England, for the figure of the traitor is the ultimate two-faced, masking-donning performer.

Becky utters these comments in response to the distress Amelia exhibits when her friend throws the dictionary offered by Miss Jemima on Becky's departure from the school out the carriage window. Avrom Fleishman argues in the chapter, "A Napoleon of Heroines: Historical Myth in *Vanity Fair*," that Becky conveys "her rejection of the

values and authorities of that institution [Miss Pinkerton's establishment and 'the Establishment at large'] by throwing back its parting gift, a copy of Dr. Johnson's *Dictionary*."[105] I would add more specifically that, in this symbolic gesture from the novel's first pages, Becky likewise rejects the English language and traditional English social values. Becky's declaration, "*Vive la France!*," indeed, is the seedling of her burgeoning talent for employing language in order to manipulate her identity. She uses French strategically to camouflage her identity, and even at times feigns a French accent speaking English to do so. Near the end of the novel during the marriage *fêtes*, she employs such a false accent from behind her black mask to Georgy in order to ensnare "[t]he little scamp" (743) as she once did his father: "You have nevare played—will you do me a littl' favour?" (744), she asks the boy, wanting him to place a bet for her. The French language becomes a sort of ruse for Becky; she uses it as a form of trickery or deception. Her "mother tongue" equally functions throughout the text as a mask behind which she may disguise her identity, or, in fact, a tool for manipulating her performance of nation. Just as the charades cannot render Becky legible by metaphorically silencing or immobilizing her, thanks to her adeptness at the French language, neither can Becky be physically silenced and thus easily placed within a particular nationality.

Becky Sharp's Frenchness is linked to her social class as well. It is interesting to point out that we as readers are never completely sure of Becky's social and national origins thanks to her pathological lying and distortion of reality as well as the instability of the narrative. We cannot distinguish when Becky is telling the truth, and the narrator,

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105 Avrom Fleishman, *Fiction and the Ways of Knowing: Essays on British Fiction* (Austin: U of Texas Press, 1978) 52.

though often omniscient, usually refuses to enlighten us. Regardless, we supposedly do know that Becky's mother and father were of the lower-class artistic sort, and that as Becky "advanced in life, this young lady's ancestors increased in rank and splendor" (17). She deploys the French language and her Frenchness in order to gain higher social standing; at times, she claims the Montmorencys as her ancestors in order to align herself with the aristocracy, and at others, she curries favor with her social superiors by humbly acknowledging her working-class origins. For example, when Lady Grizzel compliments her on how fine her French is, "'I ought to know it,' Becky modestly said, casting down her eyes. 'I taught it in school, and my mother was a French-woman' (591). Thackeray continues, explaining, "Lady Grizzel was won by her humility, and was mollified towards the little woman. She deplored the fatal levelling tendencies of the age, which admitted persons of all classes into the society of their superiors; but her Ladyship owned, that this one at least was well behaved and never forgot her place in life" (591). Lady Grizzel's sentiments underscore a major source of anxiety during the period: the idea was appalling that anyone, even the offspring of impoverished artists, could join the upper classes with a little ingenuity, just as Napoleon, lacking any entitlement to throne, become emperor with a bit of propaganda, as I describe below.

Becky's abuse of her French ancestry to elevate herself socially is yet another of her brilliant tricks. To ingratiate herself further with the Crawley family and later, to inveigle her way into high society, she claims to be descended from French aristocracy. She tells Rawdon's older brother that she is of the famed Montmorency family, and he, an "aristocratic religionist" (102), finds a kindred spirit in her highbred sensibilities. This

is the first of multiple instances in the novel in which Becky's ancestry is highlighted, and so the narrator explains,

> Indeed it was from this famous family, as it appears, that Miss Sharp, by her mother's side, was descended. Of course she did not say that her mother had been on the stage; it would have shocked Mr Crawley's religious scruples.…She had several stories about her ancestors ere she had been many months in the house; some of which Mr Crawley happened to find in the D'Hozier's dictionary, which was in the library, and which strengthened his belief in their truth, and in the high breeding of Rebecca. (102-103)

Here, the truthfulness of Becky's assertions about her pedigree is put into doubt, and her national identity and social status are linked. The narrator seems certain of her parentage, and yet, hints equally that Becky connivingly drew the stories herself from careful readings of the accessible D'Hozier's to impress her brother-in-law. Furthermore, her bond with Mr. Crawley is based not only on their common admiration for the French language, but also on their shared aristocratic inclinations. Thus in *Vanity Fair* do social class and nationality, specifically aristocratic breeding and Frenchness, become entwined within the persona of Becky Sharp; furthermore, her Frenchness and use of the French language and are explicitly linked to falseness and deception.

"The Little Upstart": Becky and Her Corsican King

Becky is even more concretely linked to the French via her association with Napoleon in *Vanity Fair*. Several scholars have treated Thackeray's linking of Becky with the French Emperor, particularly noting that this link functions as a major part of the overarching war metaphor that Thackeray deploys throughout his narrative.[106] However, the connection Thackeray portrays between Becky and Napoleon also further solidifies the link between concerns about political legitimacy and anxiety about feminine authenticity during the nineteenth century. Edgar F. Harden points out that the language Thackeray uses to describe Becky Sharp often explicitly aligns her with the former French Emperor; for example, like Napoleon, the "Corsican upstart" (Thackeray 62, 194, 389), Becky is often called "a little upstart" (67, 404) in *Vanity Fair*. Thackeray equally declares that Becky's husband "believed in his wife as much as the French soldiers believed in Napoleon" (402).[107] Moreover, like the novel's principle characters, but above all, Becky, Napoleon is described as an actor playing a role in a great drama. When Dobbin's sisters express their relief that their brother is being sent off to war, which will certainly save him from Amelia's charms, the narrator announces, "[A]nd so it is that the French Emperor comes in to perform a part in this domestic comedy which we are now playing, and which would never have been enacted without the intervention of

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106 For further discussion of Becky Sharp's similarities to Napoleon, see also Avrom Fleishman, *Fiction and the Ways of Knowing*; Daleski, *Unities*; and Harden, "The Field of Mars in *Vanity Fair*."

107 Edgar F. Harden, "The Field of Mars in *Vanity Fair*," *Tennessee Studies in Literature* 10 (1965) 125 Web, 22 July 2011.

this august mute personage" (202). That the French emperor's participates in "this domestic comedy" implies that he, like Becky, is simply acting in charade. Not only does this comment, of course, function to satirize Napoleon, but it also illuminates the performativity, or rather, inauthenticity and illegitimacy that characterize both the French politician and the novel's heroine.

Interestingly, Napoleon and Becky are also both marked as foreigners within the societies over which they seek to prevail; indeed, Becky is perhaps more French than the Emperor of the French. Discussing their legendary myth-making abilities, Fleishman notes how clearly Becky Sharp is aligned with Napoleon Bonaparte in Thackeray's novel. He describes the heroine and the Emperor as both "outsider[s] in the dominant society" (53), observing, "like the Corsican upstart Becky identifies herself with the dominant culture in order to make her conquest. In Napoleon's case, this involved transforming himself and his family into the royal lineage which the revolution has deposed. In Becky's case, assimilation into the dominant culture is a never-ending process" (54). Both foreigners, the heroine and Emperor come to dominate the dominant culture. To do so, they must unsettle social structures, specifically by unexpectedly climbing the rungs of society and espousing the principle of *la carrière ouverte aux talents*. Fleishman further explains,

> Beyond…[her] traits of cultural assimilation and cultural warfare, Becky resembles Napoleon preeminently in her rebellion against the class structures of aristocratic (and also nouveau riche) society….*La carrière ouverte aux talents!* This was the cry which enlisted so many of Napoleon's most vigorous and most

> competent supporters—the men of ability who had no chance in a class-bound society. Like the chief adventurer himself, Becky speaks for all those of intelligence, symbolic skill, theatrical manipulativeness, and the other arts by which rising men and women make their fortunes—if not by overthrowing the dominant classes, then by infiltrating and conquering them. (54)

The heroine does without a doubt infiltrate British society—as well as society throughout Europe, for that matter—and conquer members of every social class with her "theatrical manipulativeness." Becky's victory over society mirrors Napoleon's victories over Europe; the location within the narrative of the battle at Waterloo cements the connection between Becky's first invasion of society in Brussels and Napoleon's final invasion of the Continent. The characterization of Becky as a female Napoleon in *Vanity Fair* further highlights her artifice and propensity for performance: she is but a copy of a sort of self-created mythic figure, who, after all, was often considered a fraud.

Becky, like Napoleon, eventually topples from her position of influence and omnipotence. Each is exiled at the end of his or her reign, Napoleon to St. Helena and Becky to Pumpernickel. Thackeray's very conscious alignment of the two manifests itself in the author's original woodcut appearing at the beginning of the sixty-fourth chapter. For the novel's first editions, Thackeray provided the illustrations; here he depicts Becky both pictorially and literarily at her lowest. Harden points out, "The identification [between Becky and Napoleon] reaches its climax in Chapter LXIV, 'A Vagabond Chapter,' where an original woodcut portrays Becky in exile, dressed like Napoleon, with spy-glass in hand" (125). A Napoleonic *chapeau* atop her head, Becky

gazes across the water, her petticoats peeking out from under her soldier's uniform. Moreover, in "A Vagabond Chapter," just below this remarkable image, appears Thackeray's famous description of the heroine as a bewitching siren, her tail, "writhing and twirling, diabolically hideous and slimy, flapping amongst bones, or curling round corpses" (747), while, above the water, she lures in sailors with her irresistible, but specious, beauty and song. As we see here, everything about Becky is a charade, especially her identity. The narrator situates her as a chimerical, hybrid creature, who reveals her true, conniving identity only below the water, but on the surface, she is beautiful, and thus appears to be authentic and trustworthy, rather than fraudulent and manipulative. The text and image at the opening of this chapter thus connect Becky's mythic quality to Napoleonic myth. They likewise align her seductiveness with the propagandistic, beguiling nature of Napoleon's reign and even that of his imperial successor, Napoleon III (with whom Renée Saccard is associated in Zola's text), both of whom Thackeray treats at length in his other writings.

"Humbug they will have": Thackeray's Napoleonic Writings

Thackeray is renowned for his political, and usually satirical, essays; his Napoleonic writings in particular are revelatory of the implications of his association of Becky Sharp with Napoleon and the pretense and imposture of both French Emperors' reigns. Two of his perhaps most well-known treatises on Napoleon and his imperial nephew are "The Second Funeral of Napoleon," written as a letter to "Miss Smith" from

Thackeray's alter-ego, "Michael Angelo Titmarsh," and "Napoleon and His System: On Prince Louis Napoleon's Work," which appears in his 1840 *Paris Sketch Book* and is also written in the persona of Thackeray's *nom de plume*. The former text describes Napoleon's disinterment from English land at St. Helena and subsequent reburial in Les Invalides in Paris. The tone of Thackeray's descriptions of the inordinate pomp and circumstance surrounding the occasion is, as usual, sarcastic; in fact, the writer imagines his interlocutor, Miss Smith, responding thus to his satire, "I will read no more of this Mr. Titmarsh; there is no subject, however solemn, but he treats it with flippant irreverence, and no character, however great, at whom he does not sneer."[108] Thackeray indeed qualifies the ceremony as unnecessarily extravagant and marked by a sort of artifice of which only the French could be guilty. His response to the "[h]umbug worshippers" (167) is, "Humbug they will have. Humbugs themselves, they will respect humbugs. Their daily victuals of life must be seasoned with humbug" (167). Later, describing the decorations for the ceremony and procession, Thackeray observes,

> At a little distance, to be sure,…[the] pedestals and statues *looked* like marble. At some distance you could not tell but that the wreaths and eagles were gold embroidery, and not gilt paper—the great tricolor flags damask, and not striped calico. One would think that these sham splendors betokened sham respect, if one had not known that the name of Napoleon is held in real reverence. (186)

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108 William Makepeace Thackeray, "The Second Funeral of Napoleon," *Roundabout Papers From the Cornhill Magazine* (New York: F. M. Lupton Publishing Co., n.d.) 185.

The essayist, of course, boasts only "sham respect" for the French Emperor, implying that he deserved no such honor in the first place.

Thackeray's respect for the second French Emperor, however, is even more insincere than any esteem he may hold for the first. In "Napoleon and his System," written in light of the future Napoleon III's attempted coup d'état at Strasbourg in 1836, Thackeray condemns Louis Napoleon for being as guilty of bombastic rhetoric and seductive artifice as are his uncle, the French people, and Becky Sharp. At the beginning of the text, Thackeray notes, "If, in a country where so many quacks have had their day, Prince Louis Napoleon thought he might renew the imperial quackery, why should he not? It has recollections with it that must always be dear to a gallant nation; it has certain claptraps in its vocabulary that can never fail to inflame a vain, restless, grasping, disappointed one."[109] Thackeray's deployment of words such as *humbug*, *claptrap*, and *quackery* is telling of much of nineteenth-century British rhetoric surrounding Napoleon, which, while always contradictory, often constructed the Emperor as a sham. As Stuart Semmel explains in *Napoleon and the British*, "Napoleon's sway was portrayed as depending on his mastery of superficial allure—hence the frequent conceit [in 'sartorial imagery'] of stripping away Napoleon's surface appeal (his mask or clothes) to reveal his true character" (34). Furthermore, Napoleon's theatrics—from his grandiloquent rhetoric to over-the-top parades and pageantry—were marked for the British as exclusively French and guaranteed to be most effective on the French: Semmel continues, quoting an

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109 William Makepeace Thackeray, "Napoleon and His System: On Prince Napoleon's Work," *The Paris Sketchbook*; *Paris, Irish, and Eastern Sketches* (New York: Belford, Clarke and Co., 1886) 108.

1809 pamphlet, *The Exposé, or, Napoleone Buonaparte Unmasked*, "[T]he point was that Napoleon's theatrical trickery was especially likely to work in a France, a nation 'naturally prone to vain fancy' and entirely ready to serve as 'the echo of this egotism, even to the extreme bombast of extravagant representation!'" (34). That Thackeray equates Becky with Napoleon, who, in the British imagination, was often seen as a propagandistic imposter of an emperor engaged in typically French political trickery, is particularly telling of how the writer wants us to interpret his heroine.

Becky's portrayal as a sort of "female Napoleon" in *Vanity Fair*, thus, solidifies the counterfeit nature of her identity: a copy of the Emperor of France, whose own legitimacy was doubtful at best, the heroine is portrayed as a reproduction of a fraud. The multiple levels of imitation and performance at play in Becky's embodiment and exploitation of Frenchness and relationship to Napoleon complicate how we perceive her identity production in *Vanity Fair* and Thackeray's representation of identity in his novel. In her performances of national identity, Becky clearly "acts naturally": she illustrates the tension between, yet reconciliation of, authentic or inherent identity and fake or performed identity. Thanks to the inconsistent narrator and Becky's propensity for falsehood, we never know whether she is French by birth. However, it becomes clear that this does not matter, for Becky, like nineteenth-century actors who subscribed to the theories of natural acting, manages to incorporate her personal subjectivity with her acted role, while seemingly erasing both her inherent identity and the process of acting.

Becky, King George, and the Performance of Englishness

A discussion of Becky's performance of Englishness deserves more extensive treatment and is beyond the scope of this project, but it is interesting to note that the heroine's manipulation of her national identity includes her frequent (and often successful) attempts at assimilation into English culture, specifically via her performance of conventional English femininity. A key scene marking the pinnacle of Becky's social ascent is her presentation at Court, when she meets King George. We are not privy to the events of Becky's encounter with her "Imperial Master" (559), for it takes place outside the narrative, but the narrator does recount her change in spirit and alleged loyalties after her meeting with the monarch. As Thackeray explains, "[I]n all London there was no more loyal heart than Becky's after this interview. The name of her King was always on her lips, and he was proclaimed by her to be the most charming of men.…indeed she amused and somewhat pestered her acquaintance with her perpetual talk about his urbanity and beauty" (559). She has a portrait painted of George IV and wears an image of him in a brooch. While her manipulation of the French language and Frenchness are more explicit, Becky's efforts such as these at integration into the English upper class show the facility with which the heroine is able to slip back and forth across the boundaries of nationality, class, and gender.

Renée, Paris, and Napoleon III

Whereas Renée does not reconstruct her national identity overtly and deliberately in the way that Becky revises her own nationality, Zola does mark her as particularly French via her close association with Paris and Napoleon III. In many ways, the brutality of Napoleon III's Haussmannization in which Saccard revels is imposed upon the body of Renée. One of the most remarkable scenes in *La Curée* features Saccard and his first wife, Angèle, in a café at Montmartre. Zola describes Saccard's prophetic vision of Paris, a city violently dissected and dismembered in order to make way for the great boulevards of the modern-day metropolis: "Paris haché à coups de sabre, les veines ouvertes, nourrissant cent mille terrassiers et maçons, traversé par d'admirables voies stratégiques qui mettront les forts au cœur des vieux quartiers" (114) (Paris slashed to pieces with a saber, its veins laid open to provide nourishment for a hundred thousand excavators and masons, and in the end you'll have a city crisscrossed by fine strategic highways that will put fortresses right in the heart of the old neighborhoods [75]). Like Paris, decimated by Napoleon III's work to renew the city and create a socially and fiscally successful capital, Renée has been violated by three powerful men, one of whom especially has used her in order to make a profit for himself. First, "un homme de quarante ans, riche, marié" (104) (a man of forty, wealthy and married [65]) rapes her, and then Maxime takes up with her to amuse himself and just as carelessly disposes her of when he must marry the rich but sickly hunchback, Louise. Renée's husband, of course, is far guiltier than either of the other men for exploiting Renée and capitalizing on her wealth and weaknesses. Ultimately, she is nothing but an investment to him, and he

both financially and sexually violates her. Taking advantage of a girl who already been ruined, he weds Renée for her wealth, swindles her throughout their marriage, and squanders away her property in fraudulent investments; finally, he effectively blackmails Renée in order to regain access to his "marital prerogatives." The scene at Montmartre and Saccard's violent vision at the café prefigure both the drastic and destructive violation of Paris by Haussmann and Napoleon III as well as the brutality that Renée will undergo throughout the novel at the hands of men seeking to profit from her. Her rise to social glory is as brilliant as Paris's ascendance to superiority as a modernized city; however, the cost Renée must pay to attain such heights is as horrific as the gruesome dissection that Paris undergoes throughout *La Curée*.

Renée meets her monarch at Court when she reaches her social prime, linking her both to the ruler and to France. Exquisitely attired at the court ball, Renée encounters Napoleon III, "une apparition" (166) who apparently later becomes somewhat of a close acquaintance; this night, remarkably, is "la note aiguë de sa vie" (166) (the high point of her life [128]). Like Becky, Renée has begged to be taken to a court ball and finally receives her wish. During this momentous scene, Napoleon III walks arm-in-arm with one of his generals down the aisle of parted, bowing bodies, slowly and rhythmically approaching Renée. She bows as the Emperor and his general stare at her for a moment, and she overhears their flattering exchange. Napoleon III, "ce rêveur équivoque" (that lascivious dreamer [127]), whispers, "Voyez donc, général, une fleur à cueillir, un mystérieux œillet panaché blanc et noir" (168) (Now there, general, is a flower worth picking, a mysterious pink carnation with white and black streaks [127-128]), to which

the general replies, "Sire, cet œillet-là irait diantrement bien à nos boutonnières" (Sire, that carnation there would looked damned good in our buttonholes! [128]). This compliment from the Emperor connects her with Napoleon III and provides her with a joyful memory that she frequently recalls throughout the rest of her life.

At the end of *La Curée*, Renée encounters Napoleon III once again; this time, weary and defeated, she is riding in the Bois de Boulogne as in the novel's opening scene. The Emperor rides past her, much aged, yet nonetheless a beacon of victory and grandeur. Renée's social ruin and subsequent death at the text's close foretell the Emperor's defeat a few years later in 1870. Meanwhile, however, Napoleon III appears in all his glory in this scene and offers Renée an unforgettable, poignant, and quintessential image of Second Empire life. After Saccard cries out, "Vive l'empereur!," Renée "resta un moment les yeux grands ouverts, plein de cette apparition, qui lui rappelait une autre heure de sa vie. Il lui semblait que l'empereur, en se mêlant à la file des voitures, venait d'y mettre le dernier rayon nécessaire, et de donner un sens à ce défilé triomphal. Maintenant, c'était une gloire" (336) (sat for a moment with her eyes wide open, full of what she had just seen, which reminded her of another time in her life. To her it seemed that the Emperor, by inserting himself into the line of carriages, had just added the last essential radiance to this triumphal procession and given it meaning. Now it was a glory to behold [291]). Her social victory during the novel, in time with Napoleon III's glorious reign over France, and her ensuing downfall, prefiguring the demise of the Napoleon III, connects her to the French Empire and solidifies her identity as a French woman marked by performance and inauthenticity.

The alignment of these heroines with Napoleon and Napoleon III illuminates the connection between concerns about political legitimacy and anxiety over feminine authenticity. Napoleon III was widely considered a political travesty during the period when *Vanity Fair* was published and during the years that followed. In 1852, Marx penned *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, famously declaring, "Hegel remarks that all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: he first time as tragedy, the second as farce."[110] The farce to which Marx refers, of course, is Napoleon III's third and successful *coup d'état*, which allowed him to proclaim himself Emperor, much as his uncle Napoleon had done over fifty years earlier. As Carpenter points out in the chapter, "Political Prostheses and Imperial Imposters," Napoleon's nephew was "[d]iscounted as an illegitimate heir to the throne and as a lackluster and presumptuous counterfeit of his imperial uncle" (45) and was the subject of a number of other critical, but varied, political writings during the time, including Victor Hugo's scathing pamphlet, *Napoléon le petit*, and Mérimée's satirical tale, *Les faux Démétrius* (45). A similar anxiety to that surrounding the legitimacy of these French emperors likewise surrounds Becky and Renée in *Vanity Fair* and *La Curée*. That Becky and Renée are modeled after or closely connected to French emperors viewed as illegitimate and/or counterfeit reinforces these characters' falseness and underscores the concern during the nineteenth century about the possibility that identity, and specifically, feminine identity, was not innate.

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110 Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* 1852; (New York: International Publishers, 1963) 15.

CONCLUSION: VEILING AND REVEALING *LES ROUAGES* OF IDENTITY

As discussed in my second chapter, we often assume that during the nineteenth century until the 1890s, gender was conceptualized as inborn and constant; however, as demonstrated in my analysis of *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* and *La Mode illustrée*, French and British popular consciousness was already beginning to conceptualize gender as a social category that could be molded and manipulated by the mid-nineteenth century. In this chapter, I have, first of all, demonstrated that Realist and Naturalist novels in Britain and France, such as *Vanity Fair* and *La Curée*, like many women's periodicals of the 1860s and 1870s, endeavored to temper feminine fakery. Whereas magazines sought to regulate and restrain femininity by the sanctioning of taste and consumer behavior in order to advocate certain prescriptive femininities, such novels, via the social practices of the *tableau vivant* and the charade, attempted to render seemingly boundless femininities graspable. Neither Becky nor Renée, however, can be rendered legible by the charades and *tableaux vivants* in which they participate, or by the phenomenon of "acting naturally." The two female protagonists are able to hide the theatricality of their performances, integrating "acted" and "authentic" identities without revealing that they are, in fact, acting. Through these strategic performances, we see the inauthentic in the authentic and the authentic in the inauthentic. However, though the authentic and the fake may seem reconciled, the paradox of this reconciliation does not, as "acting naturally" promises, reveal any deeper truths about Becky, Renée, and their personal subjectivity. Thus, as the failures of natural acting play out in Zola's and Thackeray's novels, the authors equally demonstrate how customs such as these parlor

performances cannot always socially provide a lens into unruly and unreadable female identities. These identities, after the performances are over, remain illegible.

Second, I have demonstrated in this chapter that in these novels, not only do we witness intense anxiety about feminine legibility and authenticity, but it also becomes apparent how solidly this apprehension is associated with nation and national identity. The discourse surrounding the feminine fake in both texts, particularly in *Vanity Fair*, illuminates the contradictions in British and French sentiment about the feminine fake. In Thackeray's novel, the characters and narrator convey much greater fear about Becky's performativity than is expressed about Renée's theatricality and legibility in *La Curée*. Nonetheless, in *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray's narrator clearly creates a strong association between the French, femininity, and the fake. *Because* Becky is French, she must be false and deceitful, according to the narrator. We even see the association between Frenchness and fakery in Thackeray's declaration that the phenomenon of charades came over from France; of course, the British could only have inherited such a theatrical pastime from the French. As illustrated in the above discussion of British sentiment about Napoleon and Napoleon III, concern about political legitimacy was linked to unease about the legibility of women during the period: individuals greatly feared that both trusted politicians and honest women could turn out to be frauds. Thus, we might surmise that this particularly British obsession with feminine authenticity was likewise connected to the perpetual British fear of the rise of a British Napoleon or of the spread of French Revolutionary fever. Indeed, as Semmel remarks, Napoleon became, for the British, an instrument for examining their own national identity and uncertainties about

this identity. Similarly, the apprehension about French women made evident in texts such as *Vanity Fair* may well hide British anxiety about *British* femininity.

Though theoretically, both Realism and Naturalism in France and Britain insist upon plainly showing, as Zola notes in his *Roman experimental*, "les rouages des manifestations intellectuelles et sensuelles telles que la physiologie nous les expliquera" (*Roman* 25) (the clockwork of intellectual and sensorial expression as physiology will explain them to us), Becky and Renée, on the other hand, like the Parisian women Emmeline Raymond describes in *La Mode illustrée*, "ne met[tent] pas les rouages…au grand jour" (53) ([do] not show off the clockwork…in broad daylight). The female protagonists, like Raymond's *Parisienne*, expose the great anxiety about feminine authenticity via their performances of femininity and maternity, middle- and upper-class identity, and Frenchness, and through their adeptness at carefully hiding the mechanisms of these first-rate performances. While Zola's and Thackeray's texts highlight nineteenth-century unease about women's potential to enact identities other than their own "inherent" identities, other works, as I argue in Chapter IV, shed light on the terrifying possibility that women could not only perform gender, class and nation, but actually *transform* themselves to embody entirely new, deceptive, and drastically more dangerous identities.

Chapter IV: Body Doubles: False Faces and Robotic Bodies in *Lady Audley's Secret* and *L'Eve future*

> Voici, d'abord, la chevelure ardente de l'Hérodiade, le fluide métal stellaire, les lueurs de soleil dans le feuillage d'automne, le prestige de l'ombre vermeille sur la mousse,—le souvenir d'Eve la blonde, l'aïeule jeune, l'éternellement radieuse!...
>
> Et il secouait, en effet, dans l'air, une horrible queue de nattes postiches et déteintes, où l'on voyait des fils d'argent réapparaître, des crêpés violacés, un sordide arc-en-ciel de poils que travaillait et jaunissait l'action des acides.[111]
>
> [First of all, the tresses of Salome, the glittering fluid of the stars, the brilliance of sunlight on autumn foliage, the magic of forest noontides, a vision of Eve the blonde, our youthful ancestress, forever radiant!...
>
> And he shook in the air a horrible mare's nest of matted hair and faded ribbons, streaked here and there where the coloring had worn away, mottled and tangled, a dirty rainbow of wig work, corroded and yellowed by the action of various acids.][112]

At the climax of his protracted explanation for creating a mechanical woman, a fictional Thomas Edison, in Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *L'Eve future* (1886),

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111 Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, *L'Eve Future* (Paris: J-J Pauvert, 1960) 206-207.

112 Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, *Tomorrow's Eve*, trans. Robert Martin Adams (Urbana: U Illinois Press, 1982) 119.

ransacks Miss Evelyn Habal's arsenal of beauty secrets. Revealing false hair, pots of every type of paint and polish imaginable, dentures, a variety of pencils and potions, complicated corsets, girdles, padding, stockings, perfumes, and unmentionable tools for stimulating sexual pleasure, among other dangerous feminine secrets, Edison exposes that even this beautiful and seemingly natural woman is, in reality, an artificial and degraded fraud. If "real" women are so phony, asks Edison, then why not simply substitute one form of artifice for another? By replacing a living woman with an android, humanity could avoid the sorts of calamity that artful women, with their painted faces and forged curves, inflict on men. Nineteenth-century artistic and literary endeavors frequently present images of women and their tools, like those that Miss Evelyn used, for manipulating their appearance, sometimes celebrating artifice, but perhaps more often, highlighting an enormous anxiety that women are rarely what they appear to be. Both *L'Eve future* and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) are texts that reflect this anxiety about women and their ability to transform their appearances and thereby manipulate their identities. In the two novels, the need emerges to contain such feminine fakery in order to better understand, interpret, and control "out-of-control" feminine identities like Lady's Audley's and that of Edison's android.

Lady Audley's Secret and *L'Eve future* each present a female character whose multi-layered identities are hard to keep up with when reading and discussing the novel. The mobility of female identities within the two texts and the confusion it presents for the reader and scholar illustrates, in part, why nineteenth-century society saw an urgent need to contain and control these artificial women and their fakery. In *Lady Audley's Secret*,

the titular character, referred to hereafter as Lucy or Lady Audley, is born Helen Maldon to a poor father and mentally unstable mother. She weds George Talboys, thus becoming Helen Talboys, but George, disinherited by his wealthy father because of his lowly marriage, leaves his wife and their child destitute while he seeks his fortune in Australia. Abandoning her little boy, she changes her name to Lucy Graham, becomes a teacher, then a governess, and eventually marries the rich Sir Michael Audley. Transformed into Lady Audley, Lucy is now also a bigamist. George returns from his expedition but is heartbroken to discover that his wife has recently died; however, he does not know that Lucy is still alive and has only miraculously and ingeniously faked her death. Her various attempts at murder lead her to suffer the same fate her mother endured: life and death in a madhouse. Robert Audley, her nephew by marriage, assigns her the name Madame Taylor, so that she may end her days in anonymity. Dying in the asylum, Lady Audley, as well as what I describe in this chapter as her inhuman feminine fakery, are finally contained by the novel's ending.

Villiers's android, whom I call Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana to avoid confusion with her human or semi-human counterparts, is as hard to pin down as is Lady Audley. When Lord Ewald, disillusioned by his love for the actress Alicia, goes to his old friend Edison with threats of suicide, the inventor promises to try to save Ewald by creating a woman whose artifice can never hurt him, and whose beauty, sensitivity, and humanity will far exceed any woman's. This woman-machine is the android, modeled after Alicia. Edison creates this android for his friend using the body of his robot, Hadaly, fused with the soul of Sowana, a sort of mystic being who evolved from a dejected widow. Sowana,

originally named Any Anderson, is the widow of the man driven to suicide by the temptations and treachery of Miss Evelyn. Indeed, Edison's android proves to be an amalgam of three women, or rather one woman and two quasi-women, whose mobile identities are easy to confound. Like Lady Audley, Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana is eliminated from the novel's plot at the end. The android must be destroyed at the close of the novel because she, a robot, too closely resembles a human woman, and indeed, any man would probably choose her over a "real" woman. She threatens the integrity of authentic femininity, though as established previously, we know that the nineteenth century was beginning to question whether authentic gender identity truly existed at all. Therefore, the feminine fake must be stopped in both *Lady Audley's Secret* and *L'Eve future*.

The nineteenth-century urge to contain the fakery of women with such mobile and ever-shifting identities was particularly a result of their ability to modify their appearances utilizing fashion, accessories, cosmetics, and other artificial means. This worry about women and their ability to transform their looks and thus identities, thereby deceiving men, does have a historical and cultural precedence beginning well before the nineteenth century. However, as I claim below, during the mid- to late-nineteenth century, the source of fear surrounding women's potentially unstable identities changes. In *Sexing La Mode*, Jennifer M. Jones analyzes how fashion, frivolity, and femininity systematically became linked in France in the eighteenth century; before this time, the three were not intrinsically associated within the popular consciousness. Nonetheless, fashion critics during the mid-seventeenth century, such as M. de Fitelieu, did blame women, responsible for original sin, for their particular vulnerability to the ever-changing

whims of the world of fashion, though men were prone to fashion's lure as well.[113] In his 1642 pamphlet, *La contre-mode*, Fitelieu, according to Jones,

> attribute[d] women's interest in adornment…to their evil desire to deceive…. Fitelieu claimed that the legacy of the Fall was women's proclivity for artifice and deception. Clothing was a particularly dangerous source of artifice, a tool of Satan that could only render one's life a 'perpetual disguise.' The crux of the problem of fashion for Fitelieu was that people attempted to use adornment to deceive rather than imitating nature. Fitelieu was especially worried that the appearance of fashion (*paraître*) might be mistaken for the wearer's being (*être*). (16)

Hence, during the mid-seventeenth century, the fear of feminine propensity for adornment (much more excusable than a man's seduction by *la mode* because of women's inherent weakness against Satan's temptations) was due to a deep anxiety about the possibility for unsettling and misinterpreting feminine identity.

During the nineteenth century, concern about surface and appearance likewise masked anxiety about other issues, including a woman's morality, her past, social class, and also sexuality and gender. However, the underlying fear was not so much of a possible misinterpretation of a woman's *être*, but rather, of the potential to change her *être* via her adornment. In the mid- to late-1800s, characters such as Becky Sharp, through their deployment of costume and cosmetics, could enact identities other than those with which they were born, thus convincing their audiences that they belonged to,

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[113] Jennifer M. Jones, *Sexing La Mode* (Oxford: Berg, 2004) 16.

for example, a higher social class. However, throughout this part of the nineteenth century, particularly given the increased potential for social mobility, apprehension about women's manipulation of their appearances often not only simply masked an anxiety about the *performance* of feminine identity, but rather, a tremendous fear of the potential for the *transformation* of feminine identity. While Becky Sharp, a talented mimic and theatrical prodigy, is able to imitate *comme il faut* women of the upper classes, Helen Talboys actually *becomes* Lady Audley in *Lady Audley's Secret*. The social concern about women's legibility, thus, extends beyond a fear of Becky and Renée's "natural acting" to a fear of being and becoming. More terrifying and threatening than artful imitations and imitators like Thackeray's heroine are the new feminine originals in Braddon's and Villiers's works, Lady Audley and Edison's *andréide*.

COPIES WITHOUT ORIGINALS: TRAVELS IN HYPERFEMININITY

In Chapter III, I considered women's performances as a source of great anxiety about the feminine fake, whereas here, I analyze female transformation as yet another phenomena that heightened insecurities about women's identity during the mid- to late-nineteenth century in Britain and France. I posit that Lady Audley and the android, Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana, are indeed new originals, or perhaps better stated, copies without originals. More real and more womanly than real women, Braddon's titular character and Villiers's robot succeed at convincing everyone around them that they are the invented personas into which they have transformed. The titular character of the sensation novel,

originally Helen Talboys, *née* Maldon, turned Lucy Graham, then Lady Audley, and finally, sent to die in a mental institution as Madame Taylor, fashions herself into the beautiful wife of rich Sir Michael and manages to enchant and seduce each person she encounters without revealing her identity as an impoverished trickster, bigamist, arsonist, and attempted murderess. Edison's android, physically and spiritually an amalgam of several women, is likewise able to persuade Ewald that she is the real Alicia; in fact, she is more real than the living actress whom our hero adores. Both female characters, thanks to their overly mobile and complicated identities, embody a sort of "hyperfemininity"[114] which, like Baudrillard's simulacrum and Eco's hyperreality, lacks an underlying real referent. This "hyperfemininity" ultimately unsettles mid- to late-nineteenth-century conceptions of identity, gender, and indeed, humanity.

As discussed in Chapter I, anxiety in the nineteenth century about authenticity and identity, particularly social class and gender, is exacerbated when we realize that, as Baudrillard points out, and Eco hints, no real referent lies behind the simulacrum or the fake. Discussing the difference between dissimulation and simulation, Baudrillard points out, for example, that when one fakes being sick, or dissimulates illness, one simply stays in bed and attempts to convince everyone else he or she is sick. On the other hand, when one *simulates* illness, he or she creates the symptoms in him or herself,[115] much as Lady

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114 This is a term that, as I explain below, Krista Lysack utilizes but fails to define in her work, *Come Buy, Come Buy: Shopping and the Culture of Consumption in Victorian Women's Writing*.

115 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: U. of Michigan Press, 1994) 3.

Audley actually produces, rather than dissimulates, her new identity. As Baudrillard explains,

> [P]retending, or dissimulating, leaves the principle of reality intact: the difference is always clear, it is simply masked, whereas simulation threatens the difference between the 'true' and the 'false,' the 'real' and the 'imaginary.' Is the simulator sick or not, given that he produces 'true' symptoms?…For if any symptom can be 'produced,' and can no longer be taken as a fact of nature, then every illness can be considered as simulatable and simulated, and medicine loses its meaning since it only knows how to treat 'real' illnesses according to their object causes. (3)

Likewise, Lady Audley's ultimate secret that is revealed near the novel's end, her supposed inherited madness, poses the same problem. It is impossible to tell whether she is indeed mad or simply producing symptoms of madness and is, after all, evil and therefore responsible for her villainous actions. Madness, closely associated with hysteria, was a prime concern during the nineteenth century, particularly of the medical community, and was inextricably linked with the feminine, or, as we will see, hyperfemininity.

In order to define hyperfemininity as I use the term, we must turn to previous instances of the usage of this word in the works of two scholars, Lynn Pykett and Krista Lysack, and simultaneously consider the word's intersections with Eco's concept of hyperreality. Both Pykett and Lysack discuss nineteenth-century sensation fiction and utilize the term but do not give a clear definition thereof. Pykett draws from Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, who notes, "For centuries hysteria has been seen as characteristically

female—the hysterical woman the embodiment of a perverse or hyper-femininity."[116] Furthermore, in Pykett's discussion of Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins*, she mentions that hysteria is associated, especially in the mind of the doctor treating the novel's heroine, Evadne, with fraudulence and deception. Hysteria, Pykett argues, is a "form of hyperfemininity, which even as it disables [Evadne] also marks her out as a moral heroine who is superior to the men who seek to diagnose and treat her."[117] Hyperfemininity, for Pykett, is equated with feminine hypersensitivity, or perhaps, surplus of emotion; however, Lysack's emphasis on the physicality of femininity and the disruption of nineteenth-century understandings of gender is closer to my application of the term.

Lysack uses the word in her discussion of *Lady Audley's Secret* to refer to a kind of identificatory excess, describing hyperfemininity as "a commodified form of femininity that trades on stock images of women and, in doing so, reveals the constructed nature of gender."[118] For example, Lady Audley's frequently mentioned golden locks, which give her the appearance of a child or wax doll as the text repeatedly insists, do not refer to the way any "real" woman looks, but rather, to the appearance of a mere toy or indeed, a stereotype, or ideal. The constant reference to her meticulously arranged curls, which bestow her with simultaneously doll-like and childlike qualities, suggests a sort of

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116 Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Knopf, 1985) 198.

117 Lynn Pykett, *"Improper" Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing* (London: Routledge, 1992) 175.

118 Krista Lysack, *Come Buy, Come Buy: Shopping and the Culture of Consumption in Victorian Women's Writing* (Athens: Ohio UP, 2008) 61.

"hyperfemininity." Carefully constructed via commodity exchange, that is to say, her acquisition of clothing, accessories, and beauty products, Lady Audley's looks are incessantly characterized as more feminine than that of a "real woman." Her equation with a young, apparently innocent girl shows her participation in the contemporary social construction of woman as child. Lady Audley's self-fabrication to resemble a child's plaything challenges the very existence of real, authentic femininity in the first place. As Lysack explains, "In revealing how femininity is a fiction or construct, [Lady Audley's] masquerade is not merely compensatory but actively exploits the fictions of gender and class and in doing so actively fashions other forms of identity" (58). Edison's android similarly surpasses the realism of her supposed original, the actress Alicia, challenging the extent to which femininity is something that can be produced or simulated. Below, as I conclude this chapter, I delve further into the implications of Lucy's equation with a wax doll and the similarly unnerving portrayal of Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana as a potential plaything for Lord Ewald, considering the uncanny and somewhat disconcerting connection likewise made in both novels between the female protagonists and the anatomical wax dolls found in medical schools and museums in the nineteenth century.

We can thus see how one might easily graft the implications of Eco's "hyperreality" onto Lysack's utilization of the term "hyperfemininity." According to Eco, hyperreality is produced in an effort to obtain the "real thing," but "the absolute fake" is ultimately fabricated, replacing the real altogether.[119] Eco explains in one of his examples of the hyperreal, a modern-day sculpture in a museum of the *Venus de Milo,*

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119 Umberto Eco, "Travels in Hyperreality" *Travels in Hyperreality*, trans. William Weaver (San Diego: Harcourt, Inc., 1986) 8.

but with arms, that the hyperreal is meant to signify the real; however, in providing a sign for the real, the reference is actually eliminated and the original is surpassed, if not eliminated entirely. Indeed, Eco contends, the philosophy of providers of the hyperreal—Disneyland, wax museums, the Texan copy of Lyndon B. Johnson's oval office—is, "We are giving you the reproduction so you will not longer feel any need for the original" (19). The android, of course, eradicates any need for a real woman, and in fact, does not actually reference any one real woman. As Eco suggests, the hyperreal is created when reality does not sufficiently satisfy our need for "the real thing," and it finally replaces the real altogether (7-8). Thus, similarly, hyperfemininity challenges and indeed replaces authentic femininity (which was certainly unsatisfactory and may never have existed in the first place), leaving us with an exaggerated version of female gender identity that questions nineteenth-century views of identity as innate and stable.

This hyperfemininity, or identificatory excess, allows Lady Audley and Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana to produce the sort of out-of-control feminine identities I described above, making it necessary to attempt to subdue and contain them. Much as *tableaux vivants* and charades became efforts at rendering women and their identities stable and legible, the conclusions of *Lady Audley's Secret* and *L'Eve future* try to keep feminine identities within the two novels in check. However, because Lady Audley's and Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana's identities prove to be out-of-control and uncontainable by any other method, they are finally reined in by the only means possible: their confinement and deaths. Only their elimination can render them legible. This impulse to contain feminine fakery in order to render female identities knowable and understandable during the mid-

to late-nineteenth century finally comes to a head with these inhuman—in other words, not human—female characters in Braddon's and Villiers's texts.

LADY AUDLEY'S MULTIPLE, MOBILE, AND UNCONTAINABLE IDENTITIES

Nineteenth-century sensation novels such as *Lady Audley's Secret* were frequently considered threats to the good taste, morality, and stability of Victorian society and the Victorian home. Vastly popular with both women and men (women were the target audience for these works, but it is clear that men likewise ravenously consumed such fiction), sensation novels were a favorite prey for literary critics, who felt that these novels were only meant to thrill, rather than to elevate the moral sensibilities of its readers (Lysack 44). For example, a writer for *The London Review,* upon the opening of a stage production of *Lady Audley's Secret*, comments, "We have already expressed some dislike, on grounds of morality and good taste, for this class of novels. These narratives of unredeemed depravity, while pandering to the morbid thirst for violent 'sensation,' can neither chasten, refine, nor invigorate the mind."[120] Such critiques of sensation fiction illustrate the nineteenth-century concern that novels like Braddon's could inspire dangerous feelings of immoderation in women. These feelings, of course, had the potential to subvert standards for normative femininity, the maintenance of which was

120 "'Lady Audley' On the Stage," *London Review of Politics, Society, Literature, Art, and Science* 6.140 (1863) 244 Web, 22 June 2012

extremely important to Victorians.[121] Indeed, as I illustrate in this chapter and have discussed throughout this project, a variety of forces were at play in the mid- to late-nineteenth century in order to encourage the preservation of authentic, legible femininity by curbing the feminine fake and subduing out-of-control feminine identities, such as Renée Saccard's and Lady Audley's.

A Woman With No Origin(al): Lady Audley's Serial Hyperfemininity

Balzac's *Ferragus* (1833) elucidates the importance of the objects in a woman's dressing room in helping her to shape her appearance and thus craft her identity. Much as Edison reveals Miss Evelyn to be a danger to men in *L'Eve future*, and Braddon similarly exposes Lady Audley as a threat, Balzac, in *Ferragus*, depicts the fear that women can deceive by exploiting the feminine tools and tricks at their disposal, which the author lists, or serializes, in the passage below. In one scene in this work, Balzac's narrator performs a disrobing of the typically falsified woman via an enumeration of the many articles of clothing, accessories, and other instruments that help her fashion her façade to please and deceive society. The narrator describes the floor of an average middle-class woman's dressing room, which is strewn with hairpieces, hairpins, and underpinnings. Eager to go to bed after her return from a ball, she has left her garments

121 For discussion of Victorian critiques of sensation fiction, as well as critiques of women's shopping practices during the period, and their potential to subvert standards for normative femininity, see Lysack's chapter "Lady's Audley's Shopping Disorders" in *Come Buy, Come Buy*.

and other accoutrements in a crumpled heap, and her maid has not bothered to clean up after her:

> Peu importe que leurs maris voient les agrafes, les doubles épingles, les artificieux crochets qui soutenaient les élégants édifices de la coiffure ou de la parure….Le corset, la plupart du temps corset plein de précautions, reste là, si la femme de chambre trop endormie oublie de l'emporter. Enfin les bouffants de baleine, les entournures garnies de taffetas gommé, les chiffons menteurs, les cheveux vendus par le coiffeur, toute la fausse femme est là, éparse.[122]
>
> [Little they care if their husbands see the puffs, the hairpins, the artful props which supported the elegant edifices of the hair, and the garlands or the jewels that adorned it…. The corset—half of the time it is a corset of a reparative kind—lies where it is thrown, if the maid is too sleepy to take it away with her. The whalebone bustle, the oiled-silk protections round the sleeves, the pads, the hair bought from a coiffeur, all the false woman is there, scattered about in open sight.][123]

Like that of Miss Evelyn, the typical woman's cache of tools to manipulate her outward appearance, usually concealed from the rest of the world, is likewise exposed, leaving characters in and readers of the novel shocked and betrayed. In *Ferragus*, a novel about women whose social, moral, and economic status is hard to pinpoint, Balzac declares, "Toute femme ment" (125) (All women lie), and they do so, specifically, with those very

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[122] Honoré de Balzac, *Ferragus* (Paris: Flammarion, 1988) 131.

[123] Honoré de Balzac, *Ferragus*, trans. Katharine Prescott Wormeley (2010) *Project Gutenberg* Web, 10 Feb. 2012.

implements and accessories that litter their dressing room floors. In Braddon's novel, Lucy likewise "lies" about her identity using her clothing, accessories, cosmetics, and even furnishings found throughout her boudoir.

Braddon's titular character, an attempted murderess and bigamist, is no average woman like that which Balzac describes. It is possible that, almost thirty years later, *Lady Audley's Secret*, via its considerably more radical example of feminine fakery, reflects the mounting anxiety about women and their ability to manipulate their identities. Like Balzac's woman, Lady Audley uses her clothing, accessories, and other beauty tools to fake her identity; however, the stakes of her fakery are much higher in the 1862 novel. Though "all women lie," Balzac's character does not dissimulate the ways in which she fibs and thus forges her appearance: she is content to leave the signs of the manipulation of her appearance scattered about for her husband to stumble upon. On the other hand, Lucy is exceedingly careful to hide how she has crafted herself as Lady Audley, for the discovery of her crimes is at stake. Though, as I demonstrate later in this chapter, we do similarly see the contents of Lady Audley's dressing room, which she has flung about the chamber before leaving in a hurry to go to London, never expecting that anyone should enter and witness the disorder, evidence of her meticulous self-construction.

Lady Audley produces her artificial identity using these possessions in her dressing room, which as Lysack explains, Braddon "serializes" in her novel. This serialization, or compulsive and repetitive listing of objects, similar to the compulsive listing of beauty tools in both *L'Eve future* and *Ferragus*, links Lady Audley to the

commercial realm of both the sensation novel and the department store while exposing the self-fashioned nature of her character. Lysack argues,

> The novel represents the unsettling affect of shopping through Lucy Audley's proximity to goods and her compulsive consumption, a spectacle that the text obsessively serializes through the practices associated with her self-fashioning, her exaggerated Pre-Raphaelite portrait, and the commodity objects displayed in her boudoir. Together, these come to figure as a kind of accumulation, a textual kleptomania that attests to the artificial nature of femininity. (47)

Situating Lady Audley as a disorderly consumer, not unlike the notorious kleptomaniacs of the nineteenth century that Elaine Abelson discusses,[124] Lysack points out that Lady Audley's self-construction is a part of the process of commodity exchange, a compulsive practice for the novel's villainess. While Braddon does not allow her readers to accompany Lucy on her shopping excursions, we do know that Lucy goes frequently to town to purchase new goods and has carefully selected her accoutrements as well as the furnishings of her apartments to self-consciously construct a particular image of herself. Lucy's meticulously enumerated possessions, much like Miss Evelyn's arsenal of beauty tools and the objects littering the dressing room floor in Balzac's novel, allow her to produce what might be called a serialized identity, one that disrupts stable Victorian notions of gender, class, and identity. I define this disruptive, serialized identity as, in fact, a repetitive series of multiple identities. At times, she is Helen Talboys; at others, she is Lady Audley. Often, Lucy is an innocent, doll-like or childlike woman;

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124 Elaine Abelson, *When Ladies Go A-Thieving: Middle-Class Shoplifters in the Victorian Department Store* (New York: Oxford UP, 1989).

sometimes, she is a fiendish criminal. These various identities are thus serialized, or repeated like reflections in two opposing mirrors, seemingly limitless, throughout the novel.

Lady Audley fabricates her endlessly multiplied identities through the accumulation of objects in her boudoir, illustrating how her resulting hyperfemininity challenges Victorian readers' notions of identity as stable and innate. Thus, as the contents of Lady Audley's dressing room are serialized, they lend a seriality to the female protagonist's doll-like or childlike appearance and identity. Eventually, as the stability of the plot and of Lucy's life at Audley Court is compromised, the reader is presented with a visual and sensory overload in the form of the furnishings of Lady Audley's boudoir. In this particular scene, Lucy is aware that her undoing may be imminent, and she is distressed after her encounter in the lime walk with her step-nephew, who has uncovered the secret of her attempted murder. Sitting among the exquisite and painstakingly arranged disorder of all of the objects placed in her dressing room for the beautification both of her surroundings, and especially, of her person, she is "[b]eautiful in herself, but made bewilderingly beautiful by the gorgeous surroundings which adorn the shrine of her loveliness" (295). The narrator describes,

> Every evidence of womanly refinement was visible in the elegant chamber. My lady's piano was open, covered with scattered sheets of music and exquisitely-bound collections of scenas and fantasias which no master need have disdained to study. My lady's easel stood near the window, bearing witness to my lady's artistic talent, in the shape of a water-coloured sketch of the Court and gardens.

> My lady's fairy-like embroideries of lace and muslin, rainbow-hued silks, and delicately-tinted wools littered the luxurious apartment; while the looking-glasses, cunningly placed at angles and opposite corners by an artistic upholsterer, multiplied my lady's image, and in that image reflected the most beautiful object in the chamber.[125]

In this passage, we observe the care with which Lady Audley has fashioned herself via the furnishings of this room. On display is proof of her womanly achievements: her ability to play piano, her artistic aptitude, and her flair for needlework. Not only has she cultivated these talents to highlight her new upper-class identity, but she has also found skillful, subtle ways of displaying these accomplishments for all of her visitors. The organization of her chambers takes on an air of easy nonchalance, with its "scattered sheets of music" and the wools that "littered the luxurious apartment," much like the apparent "artlessness" Lady Audley herself seems to boast. For example, before the elderly Sir Michael proposes to her, then the neighboring governess, she is described thus: "There was nothing whatever in her manner of the shallow artifice employed by a woman who wished to captivate a rich man" (7). Throughout the text, Braddon insists on her protagonist's natural or inherent qualities while constantly drawing attention to, contradictorily, Lady Audley's artificial or self-constructed nature.

However, the last objects listed in the above passage, the mirrors that Lucy has had placed strategically around the room, confirm that the seeming nonchalance or artlessness of the décor is fake. The looking glasses endlessly reproduce Lucy's image,

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[125] Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008) 294.

once again pointing to the multivalence and seriality of her identity. Just as when the text repeatedly transforms her into a wax doll, here, Lady Audley is once again transformed into an object. Lysack argues,

> There is a seriality not only to her possessions but also to her identity. The state of her boudoir, with its emphasis on multiplied or reproduced images, implies the production of identity without reference to an original. In the middle of this boudoir is not the woman, but her manufactured image…. Lady Audley is an object among objects. A deliberate surface, a manufactured effect, she exists through the play and repetition of the polished surfaces of her boudoir looking glass and the other commodities of her 'enchanted chamber.' (70-71)

Lucy's figure, reflected throughout her dressing room, seems to emanate from nowhere in particular, underscoring her image's lack of original and her own lack of origin. No one knows from where she came, only that she was a governess at the Dawsons' before becoming my lady; this is a great source of anxiety for characters like Robert Audley. The increasingly rapid listing of objects in her dressing room in this scene—"[d]rinking-cups of gold and ivory, chiseled by Benvenuto Cellini; cabinets of buhl and porcelain, bearing the cipher of Austrian Maria Antoinette, amid devices of rosebuds and true lover's knots, birds and butterflies, cupidons and shepherdesses, goddesses, courtiers, cottagers and milkmaids," etc. (295)—attest to the "textual kleptomania," or the way in which her objects hijack the novel. Furthermore, these possessions allow Lucy to create for herself the origin she lacks. As Lady Audley, she claims no particular parentage to make her worthy of her marriage to the aristocratic Michael Audley. And yet, she

compensates for her unknown birth and origin through the careful crafting of her new identity, especially via this accumulation of possessions and furnishings for her dressing room. Lady Audley's origin turns out to be, ultimately, these luxurious objects that ornament and litter her boudoir; that is to say, these possessions solidify her identity, converting her previously unreadable, working-class or indeed classless identity into a perfectly legible, if manufactured, upper-class identity, and finally making her Lady Audley.

The protagonist's serialized identity and apparent lack of original for her falseness are further evident in Braddon's repeated characterization of her as doll-like and childlike, qualities Lucy produces using all of the tricks and tools at her disposal. Lady Audley's flaxen curls, eerily white porcelain skin, bows and bangles, and self-consciously fashioned appearance haunt Braddon's sensation novel. While as readers, we are rarely privy to Lucy's process of producing such a flawless façade (for she hides the mechanism of her fakery, just as *La Mode illustrée* advises), she boasts a manicured and manufactured appearance that could only be the creation of a woman who has extensively schemed to re-fashion her self-presentation and thus repackage her identity. The text's insistence on Lady Audley as "doll-like" suggests an impossibly artificial, constructed appearance that empowers her to market her new identity. Lady Audley's nephew, for example, calls her a "fair-haired paragon" (51), and her stepdaughter tells Robert, "I'm sorry to find you can only admire wax-dolls" (56). Her appearance, then, does not actually take for its model any real woman, but rather, a child's toy, a figment of the imagination, implying that she, like the simulacrum, is a copy without an original.

Her doll-like characteristics lend both hyperfeminine and inhuman qualities to her identity: this unrealistic or surreal beauty exceeds that of any real woman. Lucy's hyperfemininity is ultimately toxic or dangerous, for her identity is elusive, impossible to grasp.

The narrator of *Lady Audley's Secret* alternately characterizes the villainess as doll-like and childlike, making no real distinction between the two. However, while Lucy's characterization as doll-like situates her as quintessentially fake, her childlike qualities, paradoxically, make her seem natural. Moreover, Lady Audley's innocent, infantile looks are unexpected for a woman who proves to be villainous and produce a surprising disconnect with her criminal tendencies. We are persuaded in the novel's early pages, just as the other characters such as Sir Michael are, that Lucy's appearance and behavior are natural, and she is as artless and innocent as she first appears. The narrator gives one of the first extensive depictions of Lady Audley's childlike qualities shortly after her marriage to Sir Michael, "seem[ing] as happy as a child surrounded by new and costly toys" (52) at her new home at Audley Court:

> That very childishness had a charm which few could resist. The innocence and candour of an infant beamed in Lady Audley's fair face, and shone out of her large and liquid blue eyes. The rosy lips, the delicate nose, the profusion of fair ringlets, all contributed to preserve to her beauty the character of extreme youth and freshness. She owned to twenty years of age, but it was hard to believe her more than seventeen. Her fragile figure, which she loved to dress in heavy

> velvets and stiff rustling silks, till she looked like a child tricked out for a masquerade, was as girlish as if she had but left the nursery. (53)

In this passage, first of all, Lucy's "childish" qualities are conflated with her "childlike" features. She seems primarily to be the latter, marked by innocence, ingenuousness, and naïveté, like a child. However, we discover as the novel progresses that the female protagonist is equally childish: she turns out to be puerile, weak, and silly, playing games with the people around her. Second, Braddon's usage of the word "masquerade" is significant in this passage because it highlights the performative aspects of Lady Audley's persona. She appears to be a child "playing" the role of an adult woman, and yet, the reverse is true: she acts the part of a child. Thus Lady Audley takes on qualities of normative femininity by appearing childlike, as women were often expected to, and is apparently complicit in the nineteenth-century construction of authentic femininity. However, the seriality or multiplicity of her identity/identities makes her a threat to said authentic femininity, even as she participates in the very construction thereof.

Look-Alikes, Substitutes, and Social Mobility

Not only is Lady Audley's identity serialized in the novel, but it is also shown to be mobile and interchangeable with other female identities. The fact that, as Braddon illustrates, Victorian women of a variety of social classes prove to be substitutable demonstrates exactly why fakery such as Lady Audley's is feared and needs to be contained. Women's possessions, such as fashion and cosmetics, especially thanks to

industrialization and mechanical reproduction, allow women both poor and rich to manipulate their outward appearances and become what they are not. Such tools thus become extremely important in the construction and negotiation of female identity. Phoebe, Lady Audley's conniving lady's maid, is frequently equated with her mistress in the text, revealing the mutability of class and gender identity during the mid- to late-nineteenth century. The narrator suggests, first of all, Phoebe's desire for gentility and upward mobility like that which her mistress has achieved, when Phoebe boasts to her cousin of her ability to speak French, like Lady Audley, and to "speak to people abroad" (26). Later, during the same discussion, Phoebe draws a parallel between her own and her mistress's previous stations as nursemaid and governess, respectively: "What was she but a servant like me? Taking wages and working for them as hard, or harder than I did. You should have seen her shabby clothes, Luke—worn and patched, and darned, and turned and twisted…. She gives me more as a lady's maid here than ever she got from Mr. Dawson then" (27). Upward social and economic mobility is possible, after all, though Phoebe has not yet achieved it (and probably never will).

Moreover, physically, the two women are extremely similar, but Phoebe lacks the tools that Lady Audley possesses to manipulate her façade. While preparing for bed one evening, Lucy points out the resemblance between her and her maid. Comparing the two, she describes,

> [I]t is only colour that you want. My hair is pale yellow shot with gold, and yours is drab; my eyebrows and eyelashes are dark brown, and yours are almost—I scarcely like to say it, but they're almost white, my dear Phoebe; your complexion

> is sallow, and mine is pink and rosy. Why, with a bottle of hair dye, such as we see advertised in the papers, and a pot of rouge, you'd be as good-looking as I any day, Phoebe. (58)

This uncanny likeness contributes to the thickening of the plot; moreover, it illustrates how these two women, so seemingly different, are, after all, completely interchangeable. Phoebe could become Lady Audley, just as easily as Helen Talboys became Lucy Graham, and Lucy Graham became Lady Audley. Braddon links the two women and underlines how Phoebe might replace Lady Audley, and vice-versa, on several other occasions in the text. For example, when Phoebe comes to petition a very distressed Lady Audley to help pay the rent at Luke's public house shortly after Lucy's confrontation with Robert in the lime walk, the narrator highlights that, not only do the two women look alike, but their temperaments are much nearer each other's than those of two women of the same social class, say, Lucy and her stepdaughter, Alicia Audley: "There were sympathies between her [Lady Audley] and this girl [Phoebe], who was like herself inwardly as well as outwardly—like herself, selfish, cold, and cruel, eager for hew own advancement, and greedy of opulence and elegance, angry with the lot that had been cast her, and weary of dull dependence" (299). That Phoebe and Lucy are so interchangeable draws attention to the fluidity of class structures and the perceived constructedness of identity during the Victorian Era.

Lynn Voskuil likewise calls attention to the substitutability of Phoebe for Lady Audley in "Acts of Madness: Lady Audley and the Meanings of Victorian Femininity" and further describes how much of the plot hinges on such look-alikes and substitutions.

Voskuil explains, "Indeed, the most crucial element in [Lady Audley's] cover-up had been her feigned death, which she contrived by a literal body exchange: she substitutes the dead body of Matilda Plowson, another look-alike, in a grave that was marked with her former name of Helen Talboys."[126] Lady Audley's artifice and the instability of Victorian femininity are but further highlighted by the fact that Lucy Audley could so easily be replaced by other women, such as Matilda Plowson and Phoebe Marks. Interestingly, Voskuil claims that the greatest danger proffered by Lady Audley's substitutability is not the "aggravat[ion of] anxieties about class distinctions that were quickly crumbling" (Acts 624-625), but rather, that she is characterized by authenticity, not artifice, and this authenticity is what threatens Victorian social structures. According to Voskuil,

> [Lady Audley's] chatty comments to Phoebe finally highlight not their potential likeness but their potential difference, for Lucy's beauty is authentic, not manufactured by cosmetics. Like Phoebe's fairness, Matilda Plowson's complexion is also faded and washed-out, her hair straight and lank rather than naturally rippled like Lucy Audley's. Superficial resemblances notwithstanding, the women's shared features underscore Lucy's uniqueness and authenticity by distinguishing her from those less vital look-alikes. (625)

I would argue, however, that Lady Audley's beauty is absolutely manufactured. Though she hides the mechanism of her fakery, and we do not always see the process of her self-production, Braddon hints at it throughout the novel through her descriptions of Lucy's

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126 Lynn M. Voskuil "Acts of Madness: Lady Audley and the Meanings of Victorian Femininity," *Feminist Studies* 27.3 (2001) 624 Web, 23 Feb 2012.

appearance, mannerisms, and surroundings; her references to the con artist Madame Rachel Levison, which I discuss below; and her equation of Lady Audley to a work of art with no original. Indeed, Lady Audley's artifice, not her authenticity, as Voskuil argues, is the greatest danger to nineteenth-century conceptions of identity, specifically social class, and, I would add, gender.

Womanly Witchcraft and False Façades: Lady Audley and Madame Rachel

Lady Audley's identity is multiple, mobile, and in, fact, out-of-control, making it urgently necessary for Robert Audley to hunt her down and lock her away to secure the safety of his family and the stability of Victorian notions of female identity. Because of Lady Audley's textual association with Madame Rachel, and furthermore, with witchcraft, her identity proves, until the final pages, to be uncontainable in *Lady Audley's Secret*. The legendary nineteenth-century British cosmetic purveyor and con artist, Madame Rachel Levison, frequently serves as a means of highlighting Lady Audley's artifice and unknown origin in Braddon's text. The narrator mentions Madame Rachel on three occasions, always suggesting that Lady Audley, or indeed, all women, are afflicted with Eve's inclination toward deception. Known alternately as Sarah Rachel Russell, Sarah Leverson or Levison, and often quite simply as Madame Rachel, the woman changed her name and re-constructed her identity at least as often as Lady Audley. Madame Rachel, from a Jewish acting family, ran a cosmetics store on New Bond Street

as a front for blackmail and created yet another persona for herself as author of her short pamphlet advising women about feminine beauty and allure, *Beautiful For Ever*.

Because of Victorian disdain for makeup, Madame Rachel's largely aristocratic clientele visited her secretly, allowing her to blackmail them. She created an identity for herself by selling fraudulent cosmetics—such as her anti-aging magnetic rock water dew supposedly from the Sahara dessert—which allowed other women to hide behind what society saw as their constructed feminine façades. Unlike other contemporary advice writers who urged women to be as natural as possible, Madame Rachel encouraged female imposture. Finally, after a highly publicized trial, Madame Rachel was imprisoned for fraud. Besides these crimes, Madame Rachel, with her highly sensationalized and mythic life, has also often been accused of involvement in prostitution. Eventually, the con artist died in prison. The allusions to Madame Rachel in *Lady Audley's Secret* are appropriate because both Lady Audley and Madame Rachel have created false personas for themselves, rely on makeup for their cunning and deception, and are locked away for heinous crimes. Each is an obsessively and meticulously self-fashioned woman.[127]

Braddon first mentions Madame Rachel when Lady Audley is showing off her talent for prettily and adeptly making tea, a faculty which, apparently, only women possess. According to the narrator, men, on the other hand, are incapable of making a decent pot of tea, and much less of doing so charmingly. Here, women are equated with

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[127] For further information on the mythic Madame Rachel, see also Helen Rappaport's *Beautiful Forever* (2010) and *The extraordinary life and trial of Madame Rachel*, a report copied from *The Times* on Levison's infamous court case.

witches and witchcraft through the language Braddon uses to describe this enchanted ritual of preparing and serving tea:

> Surely a pretty woman never looks prettier than when making tea. The most feminine and most domestic of all occupations imparts a magic harmony to her every movement, a witchery to her every glance. The floating mists from the boiling liquid in which she infuses the soothing herbs, whose secrets are known to her alone, envelop her in a cloud of scented vapour, through which she seems a social fairy, weaving potent spells with Gunpowder and Bohea. At the tea-table she reigns omnipotent, unapproachable…. To do away with the tea-table is to rob woman of her legitimate empire…. Imagine all of the women of England, elevated to the high level of masculine intellectuality, superior to crinoline; above pearl powder and Mrs. Rachel Levison; above taking the pains to be pretty;…above tea-tables…and what a dreary, utilitarian, ugly life the sterner sex must lead. (222-223)

Braddon links women to sorcery via both the magical air of the ceremony of preparing and serving tea and also through the allusion to cosmetic usage and Madame Rachel. Throughout *Lady Audley's Secret*, Lucy, much like Becky Sharp, is likened to mermaids and sirens, but here, words such as "magic harmony," "witchery," "soothing herbs," and "potent spells," among others, further connect her to the mythic or mystical. Characterized as a witch in disguise in this passage, Lady Audley has been able to mask her imposture using the sorcery of "pearl powder and Madame Levison." The two

exclusively feminine rituals of serving tea and applying makeup thus become shrouded in mystery and associated with treachery, fraudulence, and deceit.

Witchcraft, especially as linked to women's tricks for seducing men, becomes code for the anxiety about women and their legibility in *Lady Audley's Secret*. This lexicon of occultism appears yet again during Robert's visit to Wildernsea, the watering town in Yorkshire where George Talboys fell in love with Lucy, then Helen Talboys. During his trip, Robert has an ominous dream of Lady Audley, "transformed into a mermaid, beckoning his uncle to destruction" (246). The little port, in Robert's mind, becomes a dangerous locale swarming with sirens, luring men like George to their demise with their magical powers and deceptive tricks: "The far-away creatures whom he had seen floating about him, beautiful and indistinct, are brought under his very nose; and before he has time to recover his bewilderment, hey, presto! the witchcraft has begun: the magic circle is drawn around him, the spells are at work, the whole formula of sorcery is at play, and the victim is…powerless to escape" (247). The magical powers Lucy uses to enchant and win over her future husband, of course, are her childlike allure and carefully crafted, overly feminine façade, which together render her illegible as a conniving trickster and madwoman.

Lady Audley has carefully constructed her excessively feminine appearance described above through her use of Madame Rachel's cabinet of tricks and tools. In a later scene in the novel, the narrator expounds upon the privilege of the lady's maid, the only person aware of the extent to which her mistress resorts to cosmetics and devices like Miss Evelyn's in order to forge her feminine façade. Lady Audley, who only need

raise one of her frequently alluded to "pencilled brows" to win someone over such as her dear, gullible husband, does have recourse to various powders, paints, and other tools for refashioning her appearance, though it is never clear how much of her is fake and how much is natural. Phoebe is the sole figure in the novel with access to this information. The narrator describes the particular honor bestowed upon the "privileged sp[y]" (336):

> That well-bred attendant knows…when the ivory complexion is bought and paid for—when the pearly teeth are foreign substances fashioned by the dentist—when the glossy plaits are the relics of the dead, rather than the property of the living…She knows when the sweet smile is more false than Madame Levison's enamel, and far less enduring—when the words that issue between gates of borrowed pearl are more disguised and painted than the lips which help to shape them. When the lovely fairy of the ball-room re-enters her dressing-room after the nights long revelry, and throws aside her voluminous Burnous and her faded bouquet, and drops her mask, and like another Cinderella loses the glass-slipper, by whose glitter she has been distinguished, and falls back into her rags and dirt; the lady's-maid is by to see the transformation. (336-337).

These lines, along with the discussion of the hours Lady Audley spends in her dressing room, particularly with Phoebe as the young domestic arranges and rearranges her mistress's curls, suggest that Lucy does fashion her appearance with cosmetics and other forms of the "shallow artifice" that women employ to seduce men. The lady's maid, like her equivalent in *Ferragus*, has access to this knowledge and can read her mistress, even

when no one else is able to, interpreting the signs and signifiers of her femininity despite their disruption by the simulacrum.

Braddon's allusions to Madame Rachel and the connections between the feminine ritual of makeup application and witchcraft in *Lady Audley's Secret* upset otherwise stable Victorian notions of identity. Historically, "witches" have been socially shunned, hunted down, and killed for their apparent ability to transform surfaces and fabricate illusions; in fact, both Madame Rachel's and Lady Audley's stories repeat this very pattern. Lady Audley, much like a witch, is able to become what she is not and be what she does not appear to be, thus taking on an identity that appears "out of control" to other characters in the novel. Lucy's self-transformation is particularly remarkable in that she is able to create multiple and mobile identities, all while convincing those around her that she is artless, authentic, and perfectly innocent. Her stepdaughter tells Sir Michael, responding to his insistence upon Lady Audley's vulnerability, "I don't believe it a bit, papa…You think her sensitive because she has soft little white hands, and big blue eyes with long lashes, and all manner of affected, fantastical ways, which you stupid men call fascinating! Sensitive! Why, I've seen her do cruel things with those slender white fingers, and laugh at the pain she inflicted" (103). Indeed, Lady Audley thwarts expectations of what a criminal or madwoman should look like, especially thanks to her baby-doll eyes and ringlets, that is, her hyperfeminine appearance.

Nineteenth-century scientists and criminologists such as Cesare Lombroso were obsessed with the legibility and classification of individuals based on physical markers of their personality and criminality. Lombroso claimed he could classify women into

categories, including the prostitute, the criminal, and the normal woman, based on physical characteristics.[128] Some traits, of course, women arguably could not conceal, such the shape of the skull (Though villainesses as conniving as Lady Audley might find a way); however, they could disguise gray hair, moles, and wrinkles, all signs of degeneracy and criminality that Lombroso mentions. If women could hide scars, bruises, and other irregularities and even dissimulate the color of their skin, could they not also hide a natural propensity to criminal behavior behind their powdered visages? Lucy's mask of hyperfemininity, in fact, helps her to do exactly this. Lady Audley threatens systems such as those established by Lombroso for classifying criminals, denying nineteenth-century citizens the possibility of accurately interpreting women's bodies in order to manipulate and control them. Because of her rebellion against these systems and social standards, alongside her serial, mobile, and uncontainable identity, Lady Audley, like a witch, is sentenced to death.

ANDROIDS, ACTRESSES, AND THE ARTIFICAL IDEAL: THE SECOND COMING OF EVE

In Villiers's *L'Eve future*, Edison creates a mechanical woman for Ewald precisely because real women like Miss Evelyn and Lady Audley are dangerous, ruining men and even sending them to their deaths. The "future Eve" or "tomorrow's Eve" that he creates should not be a threat to Ewald, who is lovesick and at his wit's end, intending

128 Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero, *Criminal Woman, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman*, trans. and intro. Nicole Hahn Rafter and Mary Gibson (Durham: Duke UP, 2004).

to commit suicide just after his initial visit to Edison. However, this mechanical creation proves to be yet more dangerous than a real woman, challenging late-nineteenth-century notions of authentic femininity and humanity. It is no coincidence that Villiers likens Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana to Eve, harkening back to Fitelieu's comments, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, about women's inherent inclination to deception. Women like the actress Alicia and Lady Audley will be responsible for the fall of man once more because of their deceptiveness. Pykett likewise equates Lady Audley with Eve, referring to her "taint [of madness], passed on from mother to daughter like a mark of Eve" (89). However, if Edison, acting the role of an all-powerful deity, can intervene and successfully create this future Eve or *andréide*, he can assure that women, with the sin they have inherited from their errant foremother, will no longer destroy the men who love them.

When Edison explains to Ewald why he has decided to create the android, he makes a case for exchanging one form of artifice—that of "real," or perhaps better stated, human, women—for another. Edison argues,

> [S]i l'Artificielle assimilé, amalgamé plutôt, à l'être humain, peut produire de telle catastrophes, et puisque, par suite, à tel ou tel degré, physique ou moral, toute femme qui les cause tient plus ou moins d'une andréide—eh bien! chimère pour chimère, pourquoi pas l'Andréide elle-même?...Essayons de changer de mensonge! Ce sera plus commode pour elles et pour nous. Bref, si la création d'un être électro-humain, capable de donner un change salubre à l'âme d'un mortel, peut être réduite en formule, essayons d'obtenir de la Science une

> équation de l'Amour *qui, tout d'abord, ne causera pas les maléfices démontrés inévitable* sans cette addition ajoutée, tout à coup, à l'espèce humaine; et qui circonscrira le feu. (213)
>
> [(I)f the Artificial, when assimilated to or even amalgamated with human nature, can produce such catastrophes; and since, consequently, any woman of the destructive sort is more or less an Android, either morally or physically—in that case, one artifice for another, why not have the Android herself?...Let's try to change one lie for another. That way will be easier for them and for us. In a word, if the creation of an electro-human being, capable of working a change for the better in the spirit of mortal man, can be reduced to a formula, let us try to obtain from Science an equation for Love. To say no more, *it will not have the evil effects which we've shown to be inevitable in the human race as it now exists*; essentially, it's a matter of fighting fire with fire. (123)]

Theoretically, the android will not be able to harm Ewald in the way that Miss Evelyn has destroyed Edison's friend and that Lady Audley jeopardizes the lives and futures of George Talboys and Sir Michael. However, as I demonstrate below, even the android is endowed with her own agency, making her as dangerous as—and arguably more so than—any human woman. On the other hand, the fantastically beautiful Alicia, after whom Edison models his mechanical woman, is Ewald's Pygmalionesque ideal physically, but she is otherwise vapid and foolish. Alicia is furthermore vain and lacks a sense of honor and dignity; there is an uncanny dissonance between her flawless outward appearance and her interior or her soul. Indeed, when Ewald takes her to the Louvre to

see the *Venus de Milo*, which everyone says Alicia resembles, Ewald is appalled by her amazed and insipid response: "Tiens, moi!...Oui, mais moi, j'ai mes bras, et j'ai l'air plus distingué….*Mais si l'on fait tant de frais pour cette statue, alors—j'aurai du* succès?" (82-83) (Look…it's me!...Yes, but I have arms, and besides, I'm more distinguished looking….*Well, if they spend all that money on this statue—then—I may do well too?* [46]). Because Alicia has led Ewald to contemplate suicide, Edison proposes simply to substitute one lie or form of artifice for another, abandoning human women with their ridiculous games for science's supposedly uncomplicated alternative: *l'andréide*.

Ewald, nonetheless, is skeptical, exclaiming that "une telle créature ne serait jamais qu'une poupée insensible et sans intelligence!" (113) (such a creature could never be anything but a doll, without feeling or intelligence! [64]). Edison thus assures him of the realism of his proposed experiment: "Milord…, je vous le jure: prenez garde qu'en la juxtaposant à son modèle et en les écoutant toutes deux, *ce ne soit la vivante qui vous semble la poupée*" (113) (My lord…, you may take this on my word of honor: you will have to be careful, when you compare the two and listen to them both, *that it isn't the living woman who seems to you the doll* [64]). The two men continue this discussion for pages and repeat it throughout the text, Edison insisting that his android will be indistinguishable from, and in fact superior to, the original Alicia, and Ewald ever doubting the inventor's lofty claims. Ewald's disbelief, of course, is not unfounded: in literature and in history, such mechanical women have usually failed to live up to the expectations of their creators and consumers.

In Patricia Pulham's "The Eroticism of Artificial Flesh in Villiers de L'Isle Adam's *L'Eve Future*," she traces the phenomenon of the artificial woman in literature and culture from E. T. A. Hoffmann's "The Sandman" (1816) to the Craig Gillespie film *Lars and the Real Girl* (2007). Of course, such imitative bodies date back to long before Hoffmann's Olympia, but this character is what Pulham calls Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana's "most commonly accepted ancestor."[129] We likewise see the android's heritage in the monster in Shelley's *Frankenstein* and its legacy in the cyborgs of science fiction today. As Pulham explains,

> Among [Villiers's android's] fascinating descendants are Oskar Kokoschka's "Silent Woman"; Model Borghild, a doll designed by German technicians during World War II; "Caracas" in Tommaso Landolfi's short story "Gogol's Wife" (1954); a variety of gynoids and golems from the realms of science fiction, including Ira Levin's Stepford wives (1972); and most recently, that silicon masterpiece—the Real Doll. (1)

The robotic body that Edison creates has much in common with contemporary sex dolls such as the Real Doll and other doll-like female forms conceived for soldiers away at war to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases by contact with prostitutes: they are all designed by men exclusively for the pleasure of men.

However, Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana stands apart from her literary and historical predecessors and successors in that, while designed by a man for a man's pleasure, she

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[129] Patricia Pulham, "The Eroticism of Artificial Flesh in Villiers de L'Isle Adam's *L'Eve Future*" *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 7 (2008) 1 Web, 30 April 2010.

actually takes part in her own genesis and manufacture, finally exceeding the limitations of Edison's science and able to control not only herself, but arguably her intended master as well. The android both possesses a "soul" or some sort of agency via the spirit of Sowana, and, thanks to this power she possesses, she does ultimately please and satisfy the man for whom she was designed. In fact, we surmise as we read the text that Sowana, the spirit of Edison's secretary of sorts, Any Anderson, has aided the inventor in the very creation of the android. Edison has taken in Mrs. Anderson, the widow of the man Miss Evelyn seduced, duped, and led to suicide, to aid her after she is left helpless and penniless on the street with her two boys thanks to the conniving fraudster. Eventually, the scientist decides to hypnotize Any to cure her misery and ailments resulting from her husband's suicide. Surprisingly, Any's gift for entering a trance-like state surpasses Edison's expectations, and she is able to utilize her supernatural powers to control Hadaly, even from quite a distance, such as across the city.

Any's powers, in fact, surpass the inventor's awareness and knowledge. As Minsoo Kang elucidates in "Building the Sex Machine: The Subversive Potential of the Female Robot,"

> the female spirit in control of the android is Sowana herself, who aided Edison in its construction for her own purpose. Ewald thinks of pointing out the presence of the spirit in the machine, but remembers that Hadaly asked him to keep their conversation a secret from her creator, making him an accomplice in her subterfuge, and hence in the spirit Sowana's secret revolt against Edison and his rhetoric of total male control over the artificial female body. The possibility of

> Sowana's possession of the machine is affirmed by the fact that in the penultimate chapter, after the departure of Ewald and Hadaly from Menlo Park, Edison discovers that the spirit has left the still-entranced Anna Anderson, finally causing the body to die.[130]

Edison is cognizant of Sowana's faculties, the interest she has taken in his android project, and her ability to temporarily inhabit the machine and control it, but he does not understand the power she holds over the finished creation. The inventor explains that once she sees the robot in its first stages of development, "Sowana—comme en proie à je ne sais quelle exaltation concentrée—me demanda de lui en expliquer les plus secrets arcanes—afin, l'ayant étudiée en totalité, de pouvoir, *a l'occasion*, S'Y INCORPERER ELLE-MEME ET L'ANIMER DE SON ETAT 'SURNATUREL'" (359-360) (Sowana, as if subject to some demonic spirit of exultation, forced me to explain all its most hidden secrets—until, when she had studied every last detail, she was able, *occasionally*, TO INCORPORATE HERSELF WITHIN IT, AND ANIMATE IT WITH HER "SUPERNATUAL" BEING [211]). This supernatural gift clearly far exceeds Edison's understanding; he truly believes that science, under his own control, is responsible for the realism of his creation. However, it is Sowana's free will acting in the android, of which Edison is only half-aware, that animates the robotic Alicia, making Sowana the master of this fabrication.

While she is an artificial creation, Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana is actually, after all, a *self*-created and controlled being who eventually dominates Ewald, much as Lady Audley

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130 Minsoo Kang, "Building the Sex Machine: The Subversive Potential of the Female Robot" *Intertexts* 9.1 (2005) 12 Web, 30 April 2010.

dominates every man with whom she comes into contact. Vera Klekovkina situates Sowana as a rival to Edison, arguing, "Sowana's supernatural intervention masquerades Hadaly's shortcomings and shows her gullible creator who is the real master of the machine."[131] Ewald falls in love with the machine, not for how clearly she resembles Alicia as Edison intended, but for her own mind and desires. He is thus anxious to whisk the android away to his country home and live with her in solitude; as Klekovkina explains, "Due to Sowana's supernatural qualities, Hadaly is able to anticipate her master's wishes and desires, ultimately turning Ewald into her slave who is eager to remove himself from the world" (37). Too real to continue existing in our imperfect world, however, the android must be eliminated: a fire breaks out on the ship transporting her and Ewald home, thus destroying the threatening machine. Like Lady Audley, Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana must be removed from the story before its end to restore order to a universe disrupted by these characters' challenges to the social order, and indeed, in the case of Villiers's work, the android's disturbance of society's very conception of humanity.

Living Masterpieces: Lady Audley and *L'Andréide* as Works of Art

The tales of Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana, her mechanical predecessors, and robotic successors can obviously be traced back to the Pygmalion myth, as Pulham also argues.

131 Vera A. Klekovkina, "Mechanical Beauty or Death of Love: Villiers de L'Isle-Adam's *L'Eve Future*" *Aimer et Mourir: Love, Death, and Women's Loves in Texts of French Expression* Ed. Eilene Hoft-March and Judith Holland Sarnecki (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009) 36.

However, while in Pygmalion, the sculptor's statue, Galatea, is brought to life, in both *Lady Audley's Secret* and *L'Eve future*, living women are instead transformed into works of art. Unlike Becky and Renée, who imitate works of art in their respective charade and *tableau vivant* scenes, Lady Audley and the actress Alicia actually become artistic masterpieces. Indeed, one might call them works of art without originals, imitative, without referencing any particular model. While Lucy is recreated in the Pre-Raphaelite painting so vividly described in the novel, Alicia, of course, is characterized as a work of art when Edison (with much aid from Sowana) resurrects her as the android. Because they are not only transformed, but also self-transformed, in many ways, into works of art, Lady Audley and the android are particularly dangerous. These female characters possess an agency that allows them to create and manipulate their particularly mutable and mobile identities. Furthermore, a sense of confusion between copies and originals arises, situating Lucy and Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana as women without origins, and thus copies of nothing. Indeed, their hyperfemininity is highlighted in their transformations into works of arts because their very femininity is shown therein to exceed the bounds of reality.

In *Lady Audley's Secret*, a vividly described Pre-Raphaelite portrait has been commissioned to represent Lady Audley and to adorn her chambers. Lucy is thus transformed into a work of art and immortalized by her portraitist; however, as I argue, she also metaphorically transforms herself into a work of art through her meticulous self-fashioning accomplished largely by her material objects, including this very painting. Readers of the novel and viewers of the portrait get the sense that the painting somehow

both is and is not Lady Audley; it certainly does not represent the pretty, golden-haired, blue-eyed angel everyone takes her to be. Braddon describes the painting: "It was so like and yet so unlike; it was as if you had burned strange-coloured fires before my lady's face, and by their influence brought out new lines and new expressions never seen in it before…[M]y lady, in [the Pre-Raphaelite's] portrait of her, had something of the aspect of a beautiful fiend" (70-71). The portraitist has exaggerated every detail of Lady Audley's already overstated appearance, lending a fiery air to her persona with the "crimson dress," "red gold gleaming in the yellow hair," and "ripe scarlet of the pouting lips" (71) that he or she depicts. These fiery qualities, of course, also provide quite a contrast to Lucy's usual soft, delicate, and doll-like appearance. Both Robert and Alicia note that the painting has an unidentifiable unusual quality to it. Indeed, Alicia notes, "I think that sometimes a painter is in a manner inspired, and is able to see, through the normal expression of the face, another expression that is equally part of it, though not to be perceived by common eyes. *We* have never seen my lady look as she does in that picture, but I think that she *could* look so" (71-72). Braddon likewise creates tension between the terms "original" and "copy," making it impossible to tell, between Lady Audley and her portrait, which is the model and which is the finished product. Furthermore, Dorian Gray's portrait, discussed in Chapter I, is clearly in dialogue with Lucy's painting, for both masterpieces have the power to expose the evil and corruption of their respective subjects and reveal their secrets. After all, George realizes his wife is still alive and has become Lady Audley when he views the Pre-Raphaelite portrait.

Indeed, Braddon shows, almost three decades before Wilde does so, that art may reveal what life can hide.

This painting clearly plays a role in Lady Audley's self-construction, for she has chosen it, like the objects in her boudoir, to represent her in a particular way, specifically, to portray her femininity and upper-class identity. The portrait participates in the widespread serialization of Lucy's overly feminine traits, particularly her golden locks, in order to draw attention once more to the instability of gender identity that Victorian readers were beginning to understand. Specifically, the portrait renders identity unstable by dangerously subverting Victorian expectations of identity; for example, it is unclear whether Lady Audley actually embodies the doll-like and childlike qualities that characterize her appearance, or the fiendish features the painting suggests. The repetition of her beautiful curls and her other exaggerated features within the painting produce precisely that hyperfemininity that manages to conflate reality and its fakes, or indeed, originals and their copies. The Pre-Raphaelite work is simultaneously a representation of the Lady Audley who *is* and the potential Lady Audley, one who *could be*. Alicia imagines, correctly after all, that the portrait somehow embodies the latent evil lying behind Lucy's carefully fashioned childlike façade. Simply mimicking her idea of "authentic" womanhood, Lady Audley is already a "fake" herself and thus exhibits in her portrait a sort of copy of a copy, with its exaggeration of her already overstated features. As Lysack points out,

> Her 'disordered hair'—Lucy's most serialized accessory and perhaps the novels' most persistent token of her hyperfemininity—emerges here again where, once

> more, we get the sense that Lucy is consciously posing. As a facsimile of Woman, Lucy is a copy or a duplication. Lady Audley is her painting, and her painting is she. Both are copies without an original. (Lysack 65)

A woman without origin, Lucy likewise refuses to be either a copy or an original, denying the delineation between the fake and the real. Lucy imitates no one, but rather, constantly performs and transforms herself into her multiple, mobile, and uncontainable new identities.

In *L'Eve future*, Villiers situates the android as a product of both science and of art. To create his machine in the actress Alicia's likeness, Edison convinces the woman that he is going to launch her theatrical career by helping her prepare a new repertoire and commissioning a marble statue of her to promote her image. Edison will then keep the girl in a hypnotic state throughout the accomplishment of these tasks, so she will not ask questions as they record her voice and her likeness to utilize in the creation of *l'andréide*. When he explains the alleged plans to Alicia, the inventor describes Sowana, who will assist him in constructing the android, thus: "Cette souveraine ciseleuse du marbre et de l'albâtre, disons-nous, est donc littéralement prodigieuse de rapidité! Elle procède par des moyens tout nouveaux! Une découverte récente…En trois semaines elle reproduit magnifiquement et avec fidélité de rendu scrupuleuse les animaux et les humains" (295) (She is not only a supreme artist in marble and alabaster, but the speed of her execution is literally prodigious! She makes use of hitherto unknown techniques, of all the most recent discoveries. In three weeks she can reproduce magnificently, and with an exactness that's positively uncanny, any sort of figure, animal or human [175]). Though

creating a marble statue of Alicia is not, in fact, the task Sowana is charged with completing, that she is metaphorically characterized as a brilliant sculptor is significant. Sowana, after all, molds the robotic woman through the aid she lends Edison in the machine's physical construction, and, more important, with the quasi-magical powers of her mind and soul. Alicia herself is meant to pose as Eve for Sowana's supposed sculpture, though she has no idea to what extent she will actually take on this role: "Posez donc en Eve: c'est la pose la plus distinguée. Nulle autre artiste, je le gagerais, n'osera jouer ni chanter après vous, l'*Eve future*" (297) (So you must pose as Eve; it's the most distinguished pose of all. No other artist, I dare say, will dare to take the role or sing the part, after you've made it yours, of *Tomorrow's Eve* [177]). Ultimately, Alicia is to *become* tomorrow's Eve, not simply perform the part.

The android, furthermore, is qualified as a work of art repeatedly in Villiers's novel. For example, as Edison explicates that which we discover is his limited understanding of Sowana's part in the creation and animation of the android, he exclaims, "Un être d'outre-Humanité s'est suggéré en cette nouvelle œuvre d'art où se centralise, irrévocable, un mystère inimaginé jusqu'à nous" (369) (Within this new work of art a creature from beyond the reach of Humanity has insinuated herself and now lurks there at the heart of the mystery, a power unimagined before our time [216]). As Ewald (as well as we, the readers) begins to understand how thoroughly the powers of the android are rooted in the magical or supernatural, the descriptions of the invention as a product of science wane, and the android is increasingly qualified as a work of art. Indeed, when Ewald and Edison bid farewell a final time, Ewald laments, "Je vous prive d'un chef-

d'œuvre surhumain!" (371) (I'm depriving you of a masterpiece such as no man ever knew! [217]). Ironically, the actress Alicia is at last transformed into a real masterpiece—which she could never achieve on stage or without Edison and Sowana's help—when resurrected in the form of Hadaly with the mind, power, and soul of Sowana. Though Alicia is supposedly an artist in her own right, she is so artificial in her human form that Ewald's love for the shallow woman is hopeless.

Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana is meant to be a copy of the actress Alicia, but the android creates for herself a new self thanks to the power of Sowana. Though Edison records an entire collection of Alicia's words and sayings, the android does not employ this vocal arsenal at her disposal. As Ewald surmises but does not reveal to the Edison, Sowana speaks through Hadaly in the voice of Alicia. In their brief conversation following Ewald's encounter with the android, he asks Edison whether Alicia had indeed recited everything the machine said to him in the park. When Edison responds affirmatively, Ewald reflects, "l'explication ne portait plus. Le fait d'avoir *prévu* les différentes phrases de cette scène…n'était plus concevable" (366) (the explanation made no sense. The fact that all the different phases [sic] of the scene could have been anticipated…was simply inconceivable [214]). We learn also in the scene in the park that this android does not need to be controlled by the rings on her fingers, as her creator intended Hadaly to be controlled; furthermore, it seems Ewald will not need the owner's manual the scientist has put together for operating the robot because she can function perfectly well on her own. *L'andréide*, acting of her own volition, does not necessarily have to imitate Alicia at all and freely expresses her own thoughts and ideas without recourse to Alicia's

recordings or the intervention of an outside male force. Though he does not recognize how fully Sowana has reached her potential in the android, Edison explains to Ewald, "Ainsi celle que victima l'Artificiel a donc racheté l'Artificiel!" (337) (In this way she who was the victim of the Artificial has at last redeemed the Artificial [216]). In an act of vengeance against the artifice that killed her husband and destroyed her life, Sowana reincarnates herself in the form of *l'andréide*.

Furthermore, Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana, in her encounter with Ewald in the park, admits to him that she created herself, seemingly from nothingness. She explains, "Je m'appelais en la pensée de qui me créait, de sorte qu'en croyant seulement agir de lui-même il m'obéissait aussi obscurément. Ainsi, me suggérant, par son entremise, dans le monde sensible, je me suis saisie de tous les objets qui m'ont semblé le mieux appropriés au dessein de te ravir" (337) (I called myself into existence in the thoughts of him who created me, so that while he thought he was acting of his own accord, he was also deeply, darkly obedient to me. Thus, making use of his craft to introduce myself into this world of sense, I made use of every last object that seemed to me capable in any way of drawing you out of it [198]). This mechanical woman, self-generated in the thoughts of the inventor is thus, like Lady Audley and indeed even more so, a being without either origin or original. Self-designed and created, Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana lacks a beginning or source. Moreover, as an amalgam of many women, and who does not employ the facsimiles of Alicia she is meant to, she is both a "new Eve" or new original, and simultaneously, an imitation of nothing, that is, a copy without an original.

Thus these two female characters, Lady Audley and Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana, failing to fit neatly into the categories of original or copy, real or authentic, being or performing, suggest that these categories are not at all mutually exclusive and incompatible. Via their transformation into works of art, we are reminded of the slippage between these sets of terms. That the terms ultimately prove to be compatible, much like theatricality and authenticity in Voskuil's work, demonstrates how the unraveling of these two artificial women could reveal to nineteenth-century audiences the fragility of the conception of "authentic" identity. The hyperfemininity that is highlighted in the Pre-Raphaelite painting and the mechanical body of the android shows not only how the feminine fake replaces the real, but also how it is possible to locate the real in such fakes.

"Une Absurde Poupée Insensible": The Android as the Ultimate Fake

Oddly, though the android is dehumanized when Edison tries to create her in the actress Alicia's image, she is likewise made yet more womanly than a "real" woman and more believably human than a real human like Alicia, who is artificial and one-dimensional. Indeed, after the android "dies" in the ship's fire, and Ewald's former lover drowns in a lifeboat accident following the fire, Ewald laments the "death" of the android much more deeply than the loss of the actress Alicia. It is suggested that Ewald, in fact, kills himself in his grief for the female robot. After all, the android is impossibly, unbelievably "real." This *machine* indeed surpasses Lady Audley's hyperfemininity, imitating the appearance of a real woman without actually copying any particular living

woman: she thus poses a threat not only to late-nineteenth-century standards for gender identity, but also to the very existence of humanity.

During Ewald's encounter with the android in the park, he believes at first that she is the real Alicia, simply somehow transformed, more sensitive and less shallow than previously. Before he realizes that he has actually been conversing with the mechanical woman recently "brought to life," he is transported emotionally by "Alicia," her sudden sympathy, and uncharacteristic understanding. He finally ceases to daydream about the android, whom he was to meet that evening, and over whom he has been obsessing. Intoxicated by his love for "Alicia," he says to himself, "Je rêvais le sacrilège…d'un jouet—dont l'aspect seul m'eût fait sourire, j'en suis sûr!—d'une absurde poupée insensible! Comme si, devant une jeune femme aussi solitairement belle que toi, ne s'évanouissaient pas toutes ces démences d'électricité, de pressions hydrauliques et de cylindres vivants !" (325-326) (I was dreaming of a sacrilege, a plaything, a puppet, the mere sight of which would have made me laugh, I'm certain! A ridiculous, senseless doll! As if, in the face of a living young woman as beautiful as this one, all that madness wouldn't vanish on the spot! Electricity, hydraulic pressure, cylinders, and so on—ridiculous! [192]). Ironically, of course, he is face-to-face with the very "poupée" he is calling "absurde" and "insensible." He swears to tell Edison to give up on the project because he is now happy with Alicia and no longer desires the android. Convinced that she is as human as he is, Ewald declares, "Je te reconnais! Tu existes, toi! Tu es de chair et d'os, comme moi! Je sens ton cœur battre!" (326) (I know you, you exist, truly, as a creature of flesh and blood, like me! I feel your heart beat! [192]). However, moments

after these declarations and an intoxicating kiss, the terrifying realization hits him: he has been flirting with and embracing Edison's creation. Shocked by this revelation, Ewald, as the scene unravels, finally falls passionately in love with Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana and finds her to be much more convincingly alive than his previous lover ever was.

Hyperfeminine, the android, however, does not need the stash of tricks and tools that Miss Evelyn, Lady Audley, and Madame Rachel have at their disposal and meticulously employ. What is most startling about this mechanical woman is that she is charming and seductive—even to the point of being able to completely control the minds of two men—without the aid of cosmetics, accessories, and other accoutrements. She seems exceedingly natural and gains power over Ewald simply thanks to Sowana's supernatural gifts, of which the young lord is not yet aware. Stunned and angered at first because he has been made a dupe, he suddenly comprehends the magnitude of the feelings *l'andréide* has inspired in him:

> Sans cette stupéfiante machine à fabriquer l'Idéal, il n'eût peut-être jamais connu cette joie. Ces paroles émues de Hadaly, la comédienne réelle les avait proférées sans les éprouver, sans les comprendre:—elle avait cru jouer "un personnage,"—et voici que le personnage était passé au fond de l'invisible scène et avait retenu le rôle. La fausse Alicia semblait donc plus *naturelle* que la vraie. (329)
>
> [Without this stupefying machine for manufacturing the Ideal, he might never have known such joy. The words proffered by Hadaly had been spoken by the real actress, who never experienced them, never understood them. She had thought she was "playing a part," and here now the character had taken her place

within the invisible scene, had not only "assumed" but *become* the role. The false Alicia thus seemed far more *natural* than the true one. (194)]

Like Wilde's Sibyl Vane, Alicia has only ever acted the part of being in love. She cannot truly experience or understand the feeling. The android, on the other hand, does not seem to be acting; indeed, as the English translation highlights, this mechanical woman does not simply *perform* the part of Alicia, but rather, is *transformed* into Alicia, that is, a much more natural Alicia than Ewald's living lover. Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana embodies the very anxiety about women that preoccupied nineteenth-century readers: though she does not make use of the "witchcraft" of Miss Evelyn, Lady Audley, and Madame Rachel, she deploys her supernatural abilities to lure in Edison and Ewald. Her hyperfemininity far exceeds that of Lady Audley, surpassing the bounds of reality and into the realm of Eco's hyperreality. She is meant to provide the "real thing," or in other words, to mimic a real woman; however, as an "absolute fake," she far exceeds the seductiveness, femininity, and indeed, humanity of a living female.

CREATING CYBORG WOMEN: MECHANIZED HUMANS AND HUMANIZED MACHINES

In both *Lady Audley's Secret* and *L'Eve future*, the female characters are mechanized (metaphorically, in Lucy's case) and dehumanized all while they are presented as excessively feminine or hyperfeminine and extremely human. Even Lady Audley, a living woman, is portrayed as a doll throughout Braddon's novel, much as Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana is described a "poupée" within Villiers's text. In fact, scholars

have suggested that Lucy is dehumanized through her consumerist practices and the serialization of the very possessions she uses to craft her feminine façade. Woolston writes, "The members of [Lady Audley's] household seem heavily invested in viewing the spectacles of her opulent lifestyle…. [S]he becomes the object of envy and curiosity—rather than appreciated as an animated human being. Essentially, the alignment of Lucy with the material world dehumanizes her, as she becomes two-dimensional."[132] Though she is no anatomical Venus like Rachilde's mechanical doll at the end of *Monsieur Vénus*, controllable via levers and springs, Lady Audley is subject to the machinations and manipulation of the working-class individuals who surround her, that is, Phoebe and Luke. Interestingly, their blackmailing of Lucy is the closest anyone before the novel's end comes to controlling her and her out-of-control identity. The very possessions that Woolston claims dehumanize Lady Audley facilitate this manipulation and metaphorical mechanization of her person by removing her individual agency: "[J]ust as wealth and material goods allow Lucy freedom of mobility, these opulent trappings also limit her autonomy through the blackmail imposed upon her by Luke and Phoebe" (Woolston 159). I propose that Lady Audley, more feminine that any living woman, like Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana, who is more feminine and more human than a "real" female, similarly defies the boundaries between the fake and the real, or in fact, the human and the machine. In many ways, as Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana is a humanized machine, Lady Audley is a "mechanized" human.

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132 Jennifer Woolston, "Lady Audley as Cunning 'Other': An Economic, Sexual, and Criminal Attack on the Victorian Patriarchal Mindset" *EAPSU Online*, English Association of Pennsylvania State Universities 5 (Fall 2008) 159 Web, 25 March 2012.

The confusion between (wo)man and machine in *L'Eve future* supports the idea that Villiers was, while composing his novel, concerned with the increasing mechanization of the world around him. Throughout *L'Eve future*, we see machines that already existed in some form in the nineteenth-century world and many others that were soon to evolve in the decades—and indeed, century—to come. In his introduction to the translation of *L'Eve future*, Adams points out, "More startling and original [than Villiers's seeming prediction of future technological developments] is Villiers's intuition of the uneasy symbiotic relation between man and his machines, his sense that as machines are becoming more human, humans are becoming, physically and spiritually, more mechanical."[133] For example, developments in nineteenth-century inventions such photography, cinematography, and even x-ray technology were able to "see" and reproduce reality in ways that humans could only imagine, while phenomena like urbanization and industrialization rendered everyday life more systematic and mechanical. Adams further describes,

> At least in the mind of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, it seems likely that the idea of a mechanical woman did not grow directly from previous instances of mechanisms resembling people, but indirectly, from people resembling mechanisms, and rather vulgar mechanisms at that. Life, as we know, *was* getting more mechanical, as mass production and mass populations reacted on one another across the Western world. (xvi)

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133 Robert Martin Adams, intro. "Translator's Introduction," *L'Eve future* (Urbana: U of Illinois Press, 1982) xvi.

Lady Audley, as a paradigm of the hyperfeminine, is such a perverse "mechanized" human. Though her hyperfemininity renders her more feminine than any actual human woman, the fact that she manages to exceed the identificatory limitations imposed upon other females, such as her stepdaughter, in her childlike, wax-doll appearance further suggests that she embodies this human mechanization that Villiers alludes to in his novel. Like Miss Evelyn (though naturally more beautiful, of course), Lady Audley needs her ribbons, rouge, gowns, and perfumes to "become" the enchanting woman she appears to be. These accoutrements, strikingly, serve the same role the android's gears, tubes, and cylinders do: to animate the woman, who is thus symbolically mechanized.

Lady Audley and Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana's hyperfemininity therefore functions not only to challenge nineteenth-century notions of gender and identity, but also to highlight the great social anxiety about the increasing mechanization of everyday life in the second half of the century. Edison is frequently referred to as a god or deity in *L'Eve future,* highlighting the notion that humans may both create and be created, further blurring the lines between originals and copies, or indeed, humans and machines. In *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women,* Anne Balsamo points out that today,

> Cyborgs are alternately labeled 'androids,' 'replicants,' or 'bionic humans.' Whatever label they attract, the cyborg serves not only as the focal figure of the mass-mediated popular culture of American techno-science, but also as the figuration of posthuman identity in postmodernity. From children's plastic action figures to cyberpunk mirrorshades, cyborgian artifacts will endure as relics of an

> age obsessed with the limits of human mortality and the possibilities of technological replication.[134]

During the mid- to late-nineteenth century, it seems, this preoccupation with "the limits of human mortality and the possibilities of technological reproduction" was taking hold of writers and audiences as they began to question the boundaries of human identity. The cyborg, then, becomes a figure in nineteenth-century literature, who, like its equivalent in contemporary American science fiction, suggests the possibility of something beyond the human. Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana is clearly a quintessential cyborg, and I argue that Lady Audley, as a hybrid doll-woman, both human and "mechanized" or dehumanized, is equally such a heterogeneous creature. The cyborg woman is, therefore, perhaps the most radical example of the feminine fake in this project.

CONCLUSION: RESTRAINING AND CONTAINING THE HYPERFEMININE CYBORG

As mechanized humans or humanized machines, or in other words, fake women, the female protagonists in *Lady Audley's Secret* and *L'Eve future* are further connected to the dolls with which their narrators align them. What is particularly striking, and indeed, disturbing, about the constant references to dolls in both texts is not that Lady Audley and Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana remind us of wax dolls delicately crafted to be little girls' playthings, but rather, that these references are likewise evocative of wax anatomical dolls used for medical instruction in the nineteenth century. Jann Matlock describes these

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134 Anne Balsamo, *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women* (Durham: Duke UP, 1996) 18.

dolls and their purpose: at museums such as the Musée Dupuytren, "the medical sculptor sought to create a space where citizens might take their sons to learn of the human body, envisaged in its 'normal state' as a nude male and a pregnant female, and where 'moral instruction' might be achieved through the witnessing of bodies ravaged by disease—particularly by the malady of masturbation."[135] Frequently, the medical dolls featured at such museums were female figures, sculpted realistically and with moving or removable parts to reveal underlying organs and even fetuses. A website for a 2009 exhibit in London of such dolls thus characterizes their purposes and effects: "With their capacity to titillate as well as educate, anatomical models became sought-after curiosities, displayed not only in dissecting rooms but also in sideshows and the curiosity cabinets of wealthy Victorian gentlemen. For a small admission fee, visitors seeking an unusual afternoon's entertainment could visit displays of the strange dolls in London, Paris, and Barcelona."[136] These female anatomical dolls, particularly those representing the biology of pregnancy, turn out to be ways of explaining and containing womanhood, the female body, and maternity for a primarily male audience seeking to master and understand the modern world, and especially, the mysteries of feminine identity.

Interestingly, descriptions of Edison's android, an eerie copy of a human woman, lying before Edison and Ewald with her mechanical parts exposed, are especially evocative of these anatomical models and their male viewers. As the men poke and prod

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135 Jann Matlock, "Censoring the Realist Gaze," *Spectacles of Realism: Body, Gender Genre*, ed. Margaret Cohen and Christopher Prendergast (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1995) 37-38.

136 "Exquisite Bodies," Wellcome Collection, Web, 26 June 2012.

at Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana's insides and discuss her inner workings, we as readers are provided with the same privileged, sexualized male gaze afforded visitors to the Musée Dupuyten and gentlemen's curiosity cabinets during the nineteenth century. Similarly, while the connection between Lucy and these dolls is not explicit, we witness the villainess's similar vulnerability to such a gaze in Braddon's novel: the "mechanisms" of her fakery—not the electrical networks, golden phonographs, and motors the android boasts, but rather, for example, her carefully arranged ringlets, her luxurious garments, and her charming, overly feminine ways—are exposed and laid bare via the serialization of her possessions and identity throughout the novel. We see the "machinery" of her identity formation throughout the text, but particularly during the scenes that take place in her dressing room. For example, all of her tricks and tools for fashioning her doll-like image are exposed when George, Robert, and Alicia sneak through Lucy's chambers to view her portrait. The narrator describes the state of this room:

> She had left the house in a hurry on her unlooked-for journey to London, and the whole of her glittering toilette apparatus lay about on the marble dressing-table. The atmosphere of the room was almost oppressive from the rich odours of perfumes in bottles whose gold stoppers had not been replaced….Two or three handsome dresses lay in a heap upon the ground, and the open doors of a wardrobe revealed the treasures within. Jewellery, ivory-backed hairbrushes, and exquisiste china were scattered here and there about the apartment. (69)

This strikingly private glimpse at the accoutrements Lady Audley uses to embellish her appearance, particularly in their disorderly state, sheds light on an obsession with understanding women and figuring out "how they work."

The idea of *les rouages*, or women's secret inner workings, in the issues of *La Mode illustrée* examined in the second chapter reappears throughout the texts I treat in this work, but especially in *Lady Audley's Secret* and *L'Eve future*, as well as in the trope of the mechanical Venus. The visit to Lucy's dressing room described above unwittingly treats her as a scientific subject the viewer seeks to understand, much as Hadaly, lying exposed in Edison's laboratory, or an atomical Venus on display, might be considered by an onlooker curious about how she functions. This private look at Lady Audley is almost titillating, reminiscent of the aftermath of a striptease to which the reader was not privy. Lucy's nudity is suggested in such scenes that strip her of the "mechanisms" of her identity, leaving her body bare and her clothing and accessories strewn about the room. Her symbolic nakedness, produced by the unveiling of the secrets of her identity, prefigures Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana's actual nudity as Edison and Ewald inspect her various parts on the laboratory table. Both women appear stripped down in these respective scenes, so the viewer can plainly see "what makes them tick," just as the anatomical doll, nude and with her removable parts, allows male viewers to understand the physical functioning of the female body. If Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana and these wax Venuses are both mechanical dolls, then Lady Audley is, similarly, metaphorically mechanical: such characterization uncovers the fixation during the period in question on revealing women's inner workings.

Despite the fact that in *Lady Audley's Secret* and *L'Eve future*, the narrators expose the "machinery" of the female protagonists' identities, Lady Audley and Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana still cannot be contained as these mechanical dolls are contained within museums and dissecting rooms, that is, until the novels' endings. At the close of *L'Eve future*, Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana is locked up in a coffin-like box for transport overseas on a ship with her lover-to-be, Ewald. While her body is literally contained by this ominous box, her inhuman feminine fakery is similarly metaphorically contained by the fiery destruction of her physical being in the closing pages of *L'Eve future*. Likewise, Lady's Audley's body is physically contained by the Swiss madhouse at the end of *Lady Audley's Secret*, and her feminine fakery—paradoxically both inhuman and the essence of the human—is finally reined in by her removal from the plot of the novel and her subsequent, anonymous death in said asylum. In nineteenth-century Britain, the madhouse became a tool for keeping socially deviant, and not merely mentally ill women in check; we must remember, in fact, that Lady Audley is perhaps, not actually insane. Certainly, as Dr. Mosgrave declares after a ten-minute interview with the mistress of Audley Court, "The lady is not mad; but she has the hereditary taint in her blood. She has the cunning of madness, with the prudence of intelligence. I will tell you what she is, Mr. Audley. She is dangerous!" (379). By the removal of women like Lady Audley from society, they cease to be threats to world around them, including to the social codes and hierarchies in place.

As *Lady Audley's Secret* is the only novel by a female author in my study, it is interesting to remark the uncertainty, however, about the titular character, her mental

state, and her responsibility for her actions, that remains even when the novel closes. The possibility that she is *sane*, of course, grants Lady Audley a sense of agency that would not otherwise be possible. As many contemporary critics, including Elaine Showalter[137] and Ann Cvetkovich,[138] have pointed out, perhaps Lucy only acts as she finds it necessary in order to survive in the oppressive, patriarchal Victorian universe. Showalter offers a feminist reading of Braddon's novel, arguing for the sensation novel as a subversive genre because of the power it grants to women's writing. On the other hand, Cvetkovich proposes a more ambiguous reading: she maintains, when discussing the novel's villainess, that "[t]he figure of the mysterious and criminal woman is not…intrinsically subversive; it can be deployed to enforce ideologies of gender and affect" (55). Furthermore, she writes, "One can't specify the novel's effect as either a subversion or recuperation because both processes occur simultaneously. The passages that are most misogynist can also be read as covert expressions of female power and aggression" (65). It is tempting to color the novel as feminist or subversive because its author is female; nonetheless, we must admit that *Lady Audley's Secret* and its ending do invite feminist readings in a way that Villiers's *L'Eve future* does not. Indeed, in Villiers's unambiguous ending, Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana is necessarily killed, and violently, at that. Braddon is able, interestingly, to remove her dangerous female protagonist from the plot without killing her off, much as earlier French novels sealed their unruly or otherwise problematic female characters up in convents to similarly

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137 Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999).

138 Ann Cvetkovich, *Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture, and Victorian Sensationalism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1992).

remove them from society. Regardless of the gender of their authors, however, both novels present women who must be dealt with at the close of the texts in order to protect the world around them from the threat they pose.

Because Lady Audley and Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana prove to be hyperfeminine, mechanized or metaphorically mechanized women, and indeed, cyborgs, they both must be removed from their novels' plots. The mid- to late-nineteenth-century impulse to restrain the feminine fake ultimately succeeds in these two novels that present inhuman, and yet, overly human or hyperfeminine female characters. While, as I argued in Chapter II, women's domestic and fashion magazines, their writers, and their editors may have sought to regulate and sanction taste, extravagance, and spending to curb feminine fakery, thanks to the uneven development of ideologies of gender and identity within the institution of women's periodical press, they could not, after all, successfully and completely temper feminine fakery and control increasingly illegible feminine identities. Moreover, as I elucidated in Chapter III, though the *tableau vivant* and charade were social tools that attempted to silence and immobilize women's bodies, thus rendering the unruly feminine identities therein decipherable and understandable, they often could not successfully do so because of these female bodies' resistance to the male gaze. However, at last, in Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* and Villiers's *L'Eve future*, such rebellious feminine identities are undeniably contained: the lady and the android are no longer able to resist the persistent attempts at regulating, deciphering, restraining, and containing their bodies: ultimately, the hyperfeminine cyborg must be, and is, destroyed.

Epilogue: The Destruction of the Feminine Fake: The Aftermath

As I have demonstrated throughout this project via French and British women's periodicals and novels from 1847 to 1886, the feminine fake causes intense anxiety about identity because it destabilizes notions of class, nation, and most of all, gender and renders women and their identities difficult, or indeed impossible, to read. Furthermore, the urge to regulate, understand, and contain the feminine fake during this period is apparent in such texts because of the fear that the feminine fake allows women to create, recreate, perform, and even transform themselves into new identities. Previously, identity had largely been considered stable and innate, and gender in particular had been seen as binary and unchangeable. The possibility that a woman could re-imagine and reconstruct her identity, thereby rendering herself illegible, was threatening because it upset previously established social norms and hierarchies. That she might easily be mistaken for a woman of a different social class, nationality, or even sexual or gender identity was tremendously troubling. After all, when *la femme comme il faut* proved to be able to secretly substitute herself for *la grande dame* in the aftermath of the collapse of the *ancien régime*, she upset the system of signs and signifiers that once made it possible to communicate social values and categories as well as interpret identities. Thus, the feminine fake, particularly in its inhuman manifestations such as Villiers's android, proves to be a danger to society and, when it cannot be regulated or understood, it must be contained and destroyed.

The removal of the feminine fake from a text, however, does not necessarily facilitate a return to normalcy and an easy, straightforward understanding of stable, legible identity. The elimination of Lady Audley and Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana does not, after all, render the world safe from the feminine fake because of the knowledge it leaves about the feminine fake's potential to surpass real, human women and to upset contemporary, stable social systems. What, then, are the repercussions of the destruction and removal of the feminine fake, especially the inhuman feminine fake, from a text's plot? And what happens when the feminine fake proves impossible to destroy? I consider these questions in this conclusion in order to show the significance of studying the feminine fake in the mid- to late-nineteenth century and the ways it has changed how we think about identity today.

The feminine fake in British and French literature and culture, as discussed throughout this project, illuminates our conceptions of gender and identity in the twenty-first century. First of all, much of the deep anxiety about the authenticity and legibility of feminine identity remains with us today. Society is obsessed with the legitimacy and transparency of female bodies and female identities: we are perpetually surrounded by the worry that women are "faking it," whether "it" is a flawless figure, an orgasm, or the appearance of "having it all" in today's demanding world. We maintain a strong distrust of the alteration of women's appearances using modern innovations such as cosmetic surgery and Botox,[139] much as the nineteenth century was suspicious of, for example,

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[139] For further discussion of the rampant cosmetic surgery industry in the US, see Kuczynski, *Beauty Junkies: Inside Our $15 Billion Obsession with Cosmetic Surgery*. For evidence of the anxiety about the alteration of women's appearances using cosmetic

cosmetics usage. Furthermore, society continues to insist upon associating women with the natural in order to define their roles as women, mothers, wives, and even professionals. For example, mothers are strongly urged to make what have been deemed "natural" choices in order to provide the best for their offspring—natural childbirth, breastfeeding, the purchase of organic foods, etc.—otherwise, they have failed at their duties to be adequate nurturers of their children.[140] All of this is evidence that while sources of unease about the illegibility of women have changed since the nineteenth century, the fear itself of being unable to regulate, understand, and contain women's identities has not diminished.

In other words, while the containment and destruction of the feminine fake can be achieved, as they are in *Lady Audley's Secret* and *L'Eve future*, these phenomena do not put a stop to the anxiety the feminine fake causes. At the ends of Braddon's and Villiers's novels, the world is eternally transformed by Lady Audley, Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana, and their inhuman feminine fakery, in spite of the fact that they are permanently expulsed from the novels' plots. In *Lady Audley's Secret*, the narrator paints the removal of Lady Audley as only minimally disruptive; however, order cannot be fully restored, even after Lucy's death in the asylum. The idyllic locale of the countryside will never be the same once Lucy Audley has committed her atrocities there. Audley Court is closed up, and Sir Michael Audley is forever altered by the knowledge that the woman whom he

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surgery and other methods, see any number of contemporary women's fashion magazines, tabloids, and makeover television shows.

140 For further discussion of mothers and what have been deemed "natural" parenting choices, see also Rochman, "Mothers' Milk," *Time Magazine*, May 21, 2012; print and online reactions to the article; any number of resources on "attachment parenting"; and a variety of parenting forums and "mommy blogs."

has adored above all others has duped him. Even Robert, who has dutifully locked Lady Audley away, cannot continue to live his carefree, bachelor life as he had hoped because of his contact with Lady Audley and her inhuman feminine fakery, as well as thanks to his immense moral qualms about institutionalizing Lady Audley and thus hurting his uncle. George, Lucy's first husband, is supposedly "happy with his sister and his old friend," living with Clara and Robert, and "[t]hat dark story of the past fades little by little every day" (446); however, he has clearly been denied the blissful future he previously thought life had promised him. Despite all of the evidence that the feminine fake has been a great disruption in the lives of the principal characters and the community as a whole, the narrator insists, "I hope no one will take objection to my story because the end of it leaves the good people all happy and at peace" (447). Normalcy and order can be ostensibly restored in order to reaffirm the previously extant social hierarchies and systems within Victorian texts such as *Lady Audley's Secret*; nonetheless, life is permanently altered by the appearance of such out-of-control female identities.

On the other hand, at the end of *L'Eve future*, seemingly complete stability and normalcy cannot be easily restored. The android proves to be a major threat to civilization and its perception of social hierarchies and feminine identity. Ewald is absolutely incapable of returning to a normal, satisfied life after Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana is "killed" in the ship's fire; the narrator implies that he commits suicide. His telegram to Edison on the novel's last pages reads, "Ami, c'est de Hadaly seule que je suis inconsolable—et je ne prends le deuil que de cette ombre—Adieu.—Lord Ewald" (375) (My friend, only the loss of Hadaly leaves me inconsolable—I grieve only for that shade.

Farewell.—Lord Ewald [219]). Ewald is changed once and for all by his contact with the android, the ultimate feminine fake, and he cannot bear to go on with his life without her. Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana's danger exists not only in her ability to upset perceptions of femininity and humanity, but also in the knowledge she provides that no human woman will ever equal her. Lord Ewald must bid Edison farewell and kill himself because he cannot continue to live with this knowledge that he will never meet a living woman as beautiful, empathetic, or seemingly sincere as the android. Because the novel ends so abruptly, we can only surmise Edison's reactions to the annihilation of the android, but he appears disturbed by her destruction and the possibilities that remain for future inventions of mechanical humans. That he shudders upon glancing over at the amputated mechanical arm and its enchanted rings—sign of the possibilities of *l'andréide*—and then up at the infinite expanse of the heavens suggests that his world will never be the same now that he is aware of the potential of his creation. Indeed, from Ewald's and Edison's reactions to Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana's destruction, we know that the world as a whole is forever altered, despite the elimination of the inhuman feminine fake from the universe.

Normalcy and order are even less easily restored within today's plots about the inhuman feminine fake. Much as in the nineteenth century, we remain preoccupied with trying to understand female identities as well as with rendering women legible and continue to utilize the figure of the cyborg or mechanical woman in order to grapple with our comprehension of both feminine identity and human identity. While nineteenth-century unease about the feminine fake centered on anxiety regarding the instability of nation, class, and especially gender, in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries,

we witness a widespread concern about the instability of the definition of humanity. There is evidence that the feminine fake as seen in recent popular texts is, after all, the inheritor of the feminine fake's nineteenth-century manifestations, particularly in Villiers's *L'Eve future*. For example, in both James Tiptree, Jr.'s novella "The Girl Who Was Plugged In" (1973) as well as Joss Whedon's television series, *Dollhouse* (2009-2010), the principal female characters, Delphi and Echo, respectively, are semi-human or cyborg women clearly descended from "tomorrow's Eve." The two women are both transformed and performers, surrounded by individuals who want to keep their identities in check. However, like Villiers's android, they prove, in many ways, to be self-created and exceed the powers and potential of those who imagined them, even beyond the knowledge of their creators and those who supervise their existence. Thus, they must be controlled and contained. Significantly, both Tiptree's text and Whedon's television show deal with the fear of the power of large corporations, particularly over the minds of citizens, as well as anxiety about the abuse of technological potential and abilities. These two themes extend beyond the scope of my project; thus, I do not treat them here except insofar as the subjects intersect with the fear of the inhuman feminine fake in the novella and television show. Both texts, as I elucidate below, demonstrate how the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have inherited mid- to late-nineteenth-century anxiety about the feminine fake, especially as the fake challenges our conception of feminine and human identity. Moreover, "The Girl Who Was Plugged In" and *Dollhouse* equally illustrate the danger of the inhuman feminine fake and show that, after its introduction into a text,

normalcy cannot be easily and automatically restored, nor can legible femininity or the quintessentially human ever be reaffirmed.

James Tiptree, Jr., pen name for Alice Sheldon (who is thus a sort of feminine fake herself) sets "The Girl Who Was Plugged In" in a world "not all that *far* in the future,"[141] a big city more or less run by the mega-company, Global Transmissions Corporation, and wherein advertising has been made illegal. However, GTX has found ways to work around the anti-marketing legislation, employing "gods," or super-celebrities, to endorse various products by publicly using them. A young, pathetic, and horrifically deformed girl, Philadelphia Burke, becomes GTX's next god when she attempts suicide: GTX "saves" her from incarceration for her felony by having her exchange her old life for a new life as Delphi, a flawlessly angelic fifteen-year-old celebrity. Delphi is, in actuality, a "waldo," or robot-like, empty shell of a woman, controlled from hundreds of miles away by her "Remote," that is, P. Burke. This new personality is a smashing success, raking in millions for GTX and performing her job better than expected, that is, until she meets and falls in love with Paul Isham III. Incidentally, Paul is the son of one of the heads of GTX. As P. Burke becomes increasingly attached to Delphi, practically addicted to occupying and living through this beautiful body grown in a lab, Paul is gradually discovering the dark truths behind his father's corporation and attempting to figure out what such secrets have to do with Delphi. Finally, he comprehends that Delphi is being electronically controlled via

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141 James Tiptree, "The Girl Who Was Plugged In" *Visions of Wonder: The Science Fiction Research Association Anthology*, ed. David G. Hartwell and Milton T. Wolf, New York: Tor, 1996. 515.

implants in her head, but he does not understand *how* she is being controlled and certainly does not dream that a creature like P. Burke is behind his obsession. Paul's goal becomes "[t]o free Delphi" because "it never crosses his mind as he looks down at his violated bird, sick with fury and love, that he isn't holding *all* of her" (534). At the end of the tale, he takes Delphi away to the GTX neurolab to have her implants removed, not realizing that his girlfriend would be nothing but a vegetative bit of flesh without her connection to P. Burke. Encountering P. Burke emerging from her waldo-cabinet, he is horrified by her appearance and shocked to learn this grotesque being has been controlling his beloved and thus knocks some of the wires out of her head. She has hoped that Paul would love her for who she is, but instead, she dies pathetically when Paul dismantles her nervous system, killing Delphi as well.

Delphi, hyperfeminine much like Villiers's android, and equally inhuman, is destroyed at the close of the novella, just as Lady Audley and Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana are. The inhuman feminine fake may be contained, but it alters the world forever. In "The Girl Who Was Plugged In," the relationship between Delphi and P. Burke is unclear—which woman is the original, and who is the fake? Who truly lives, or does either? We learn in the text that Delphi's senses are numbed because of her distance from her Remote, but P. Burke tries desperately to reach out and feel through Delphi's perfect little body. P. Burke, it seems, is the one who loves Paul; however, he has no idea that the beautiful body he adores is vacant and cannot exist without the deformed woman in a cabinet underground. The narrator explains:

> Except that it's really P. Burke five thousand miles away who loves Paul. P. Burke the monster, down in a dungeon, smelling of electrode-paste. A caricature of a woman burning, melting, obsessed with true love. Trying over twenty-double-thousand miles of hard vacuum to reach her beloved through the girl-flesh numbed by an invisible film. Feeling his arms around the body he thinks is hers, fighting through shadows to give herself to him. Trying to taste and smell him through beautiful dead nostrils, to love him back with a body that goes dead in the heart of the fire. (530)

While it appears that P. Burke is more truly alive than the body she controls, occasionally Delphi moves or speaks on her own, appearing to exist independently of her controller. Supposedly, Delphi cannot function at night except to sleep while P. Burke is out of the waldo-cabinet to take care of her own needs. Unbeknownst to anyone but Paul, however, she does act on her own from time to time:

> It's pink dawn when Delphi's eyes open to find Paul's arms around her, his voice saying rude, tender things. He's been kept awake. The nerveless little statue that was her Delphi-body nuzzled him in the night.
>
> Insane hope rises, is fed a couple of nights later when he tells her she called his name in her sleep. (533)

Indeed, it remains unclear who the real woman is, whose body she inhabits. The text causes great anxiety about the human and the power thereof. What is required of a being, for it to be considered *living*? Does P. Burke live, if she is merely a creature in a box, apparently existing vicariously through Delphi, even to the point of denying her own

body food, sleep, and exercise? What of Delphi, who moves, breathes, speaks, enchants, even *appears* to love, but who dies when P. Burke is unplugged?

P. Burke/Delphi's creators and manipulators at GTX never imagined what a success Delphi would become or how talented and devoted P. Burke would be to her task. She surpasses the expectations placed on her, much as Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana, controlled by the spirit of Sowana, exceeds all that Edison had imagined for her. P. Burke's talent, not the technology facilitating her control of Delphi, allows her to take to her task in a manner unlike any remote before her. As the narrator describes at the novella's end, after a new Remote has been found to replace P. Burke and her control of the beautiful teenage celebrity, "Sure, Delphi lives again. Next year she's back on the yacht getting sympathy for her tragic breakdown. But there's a different chick in Chile, because while Delphi's new operator is competent, you don't get two P. Burkes in a row—for which GTX is duly grateful" (539). It turns out, in fact, that P. Burke was more than the GTX, or the world at large, could handle, for she single-handedly upsets the social order and unhinges the meanings of femininity and humanity for all of society. The universe is indeed changed after the appearance of P. Burke/Delphi. Having lived alongside Delphi for so long believing she was real, Paul, like Ewald, certainly cannot return to his old life. He ultimately joins the GTX board to "[use] the advantage of his birth to radicalize the system" (539). Paul does not allow the knowledge provided by Delphi to destroy him; rather, he decides to try to change the world, perhaps to prevent what happened to him from happening again. However, one cannot help but sense sarcasm in the narrator's tone when he/she explains that Paul plans to "radicalize the

system" from within the evil conglomerate. The serious threat the inhuman feminine fake poses causes GTX and all those involved in Delphi's creation and existence to consider the repercussions of the possibility of "get[ting] two P. Burkes in a row" and to rethink how they conceptualize the feminine and the human.

When Paul finally begins to realize what precisely Delphi is, the following interaction takes places, which, surprisingly, could just as well be dialogue taken from Whedon's *Dollhouse*:

> "Oh my god—*Delphi*."
>
> And his hard fingers are digging in her thick yellow hair. Electronically knowledgeable fingers. They freeze.
>
> "You're a *doll!* You're one of those. PP implants. They control you. I should have known. Oh God, I should have known."
>
> "No, Paul," she's sobbing. "No, no, no—." (534)

What is striking about this conversation is the use of the word "doll" to describe Delphi, which clearly links her to both Lady Audley and Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana, as well as the entire genealogy of her mechanical female predecessors. *Dollhouse* situates itself as part of this tradition, using the word "doll" to describe the "actives," individuals who have supposedly volunteered to give up their lives temporarily in order to work for the Dollhouse.[142] These actives have their personalities and memories wiped and live together in a doll-like, innocent state until they are imprinted with new personalities and memories and sent out on missions for which elite clients pay millions. The Dollhouse, a

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142 *Dollhouse: Season One* Prod. Joss Whedon, Twentieth Century Fox Corporation, 2009, DVD.

luxurious, spa-like, futuristic locale hidden underground, boasts of its charge of "giving people what they need," but it is clear that many of its activities and its use of technology are morally questionable. Often, the Dollhouse functions as a high-tech brothel, sending dolls out on romantic engagements; however, actives like Echo frequently leave on missions to fight crime, commit crimes, or even do philanthropic work. As the show progresses, we learn that most of the actives have been, in some way, coerced to join the Dollhouse: for instance, Echo was originally a college student and radical activist named Caroline who found out too much about Rossum, the too-powerful corporation behind the Dollhouse as well as a variety of other unconscionable endeavors and experiments endangering humanity.

Throughout the series, Echo, much like her original persona, Caroline, becomes a threat to the world around her. Eventually, we learn that her "wipes" do not work as she starts to become self-aware. Not only does she go off-mission during many of her engagements, uncovering creative ways out of situations, ultimately to fulfill each mission, but she also retains all of the old personas with which she has been imprinted. Her identity is truly out of control, as she taps into myriad old identities, exploiting these personalities' memories, skills, and talents. Several of the Dollhouse employees, including the head of security, view her as a risk to their establishment and threaten to have her contained in the "Attic," a mysterious alternate universe in which thousands of minds are connected, and the individuals therein are condemned to live out their worst fears eternally.

Echo is equally a threat in her hyperfemininity and overly human appearance. Because of her constant oversexualization, she becomes a sort of fetish in the television series, much as other female cyborgs and semi-humans do in contemporary texts. She is "too good to be true" and more believable that any real human woman. Potential clients of the Dollhouse repeatedly express their disbelief that these dolls will be able to satisfactorily meet their wishes and needs. The actives do not, as many clients think, pretend to be in love with them or perform a particular role; in fact, they are transformed into new beings when they brains are re-programmed to take on a new identity. One cannot help but infer that Echo, however, is simultaneously performing even as she is transformed because she possesses self-awareness and a conglomeration of identities from which to choose. Echo, of course, much like P. Burke/Delphi and Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana, surpasses the expectations of everyone at the Dollhouse with her tremendous abilities. Individuals such as Paul Ballard, a rogue FBI agent intent upon taking out the Dollhouse and infatuated with Caroline, cannot understand how Echo "works," just as Paul Isham III in Tiptree's tale cannot understand Delphi's existence. More convincingly human than real humans and often more impossibly feminine than real women, Echo's inhuman feminine fakery causes repeated attempts throughout the show's episodes at her containment and destruction.

The many layers of containment, both physical and psychological, imposed upon Caroline/Echo only function temporarily, and she re-emerges each time as both a threat as well as, ultimately, a heroine at the end of the television series. Originally, Caroline is contained as Echo, though we learn that she is recruited to become a doll not just because

she is a danger to the Rossum Corporation, but also because she harbors a unique immunity to be being wiped that can be cultivated to create a vaccine. This vaccine will be able to protect people—most likely particularly those higher up in the corporation—when the technology utilized by the Dollhouse starts being abused, threatening all of humanity, and will allow Rossum to take over the world. From the beginning, then, the feminine fake is a potential source of power, though it remains a danger. The head of security at the Dollhouse repeatedly tries to kill Echo in order to control her hazardous and erratic behavior on her various missions. These attempts at destroying the inhuman feminine fake fail, but she is finally successfully contained in the Attic for a short period of time. Once again, however, she cannot be either contained or destroyed, and she escapes from the Attic. Her breakout and the knowledge she brings back with her to the Dollhouse about the Attic and Rossum's infrastructure alter the universe forever; in fact, one might argue that her containment makes her more of a threat. As Rossum, along with the technology they have developed to alter human minds, become increasingly powerful and out of control, Echo seems to be the only one who can topple the corporation. Her own out-of-control identities, though unsettling and frightening, give her the knowledge, skills, and power necessary to stop Rossum before they take over and destroy the world. Ironically, Rossum's technology has both created Echo and allowed Echo finally to overthrow their corporate regime. However, much as Alicia-Hadaly-Sowana and P. Burke/Delphi are, Echo is, in many ways, self-created, having cultivated her own talents and independently made decisions along the way in order to maintain possession of and gain mastery of her many identities. Finally, Caroline/Echo (Echo's original self, at the

end of the series, is added to the cast of personalities with which she has been imprinted), with the help of several others from the Los Angeles Dollhouse, takes down Rossum.

Strikingly, the feminine fake is still feared, even when she saves the world, particularly because she represents the technology that can destroy the universe. Due to, and even *despite* Echo's powers, the idea of the quintessentially human is all but eradicated. Stable, legible identity is no longer possible for anyone after her appearance in the world. At the end of the second of the two "Epitaph" episodes,[143] Echo chooses to retain all of her personalities, rather than be wiped and regain her original existence as Caroline when all of the other humans whose minds have been altered during the apocalypse are restored to their true personalities. Thus she remains a powerful and threatening being, and her inhuman feminine fakery continues to disrupt notions of femininity, and of course, humanity.

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143 Two additional episodes were part of the series: "Epitaph 1," which was never aired in the US but can be found on the Season 1 DVD, and "Epitaph 2," which was aired at the end of the second season. These episodes represent an apocalyptic world several years after the end of the show, in 2020. These episodes are too complex to treat extensively here, but the following synopsis will elucidate the feminine fake's role as a simultaneously dangerous and Messiah-like figure. Despite the fact that Caroline/Echo and the others from the Dollhouse have managed to stop Rossum at the end of the series, the technology the corporation has developed has still eventually spread, enabling ordinary humans without the "active architecture" installed to be wiped and even imprinted with new personalities. Thus, the world is in chaos, as it is impossible to tell who is an "actual," or a real person with his or her real personality, and who is not. Furthermore, individuals are living in hiding to stay away from the dangerous technology as well as the killers on the loose and the riots in the streets. At the end of "Epitaph 2," Caroline/Echo, with the help of several other characters, including many from the original LA Dollhouse, saves the world yet again; however, she remains a threat to the powers that be and the world at large, for she refuses to give up her multiple identities in the end.

When the feminine fake proves impossible to contain, as it is in *Dollhouse* and even *Vanity Fair,* it remains a societal threat. No one knows what potential Echo retains with her myriad identities and knowledge from occupying all of these personas at once. Indeed, Becky is even able to endanger Amelia's son Georgie and, most likely, kill Amelia's brother Jos as the novel nears its end because she is only moved to the margins of the text and of society, rather than contained or eliminated altogether. Whether the feminine fake is or is not contained and destroyed, it is always a danger to society: the knowledge of its existence, once gained, even after the feminine fake's destruction, remains with humanity forever. While nineteenth-century manifestations of the feminine fake, such as those seen in *La Curée* and *Lady Audley's Secret*, question where class, national, and gender identity come from, twentieth- and twenty-first-century manifestations thereof tend to interrogate much more fully the origin and location of humanity. Analysis of the feminine fake allows us to consider the complexities of human identity, particularly female identity, and reflect upon how conceptions of identity have changed. During the mid- to late-nineteenth century, largely due to the pervasiveness of the feminine fake, identity began to be seen as unstable and modifiable, perhaps even a fake in and of itself. Today, we often take for granted the idea that identity is something we can manipulate and recreate, but through this study of the feminine fake in mid- to late-nineteenth-century literature and culture, we are able to witness the transformations in the conceptualization of identity. As I have demonstrated throughout this project, the feminine fake can unveil the possibilities for re-imagining and reconstructing oneself

through the manipulation of class, national, and gender identity, and indeed, even via a renegotiation of what it means to be human.

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